



Minnesota Zen
Meditation Center



50 Years of Awakening Together



Welcome!



The 50th Anniversary of the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center is a true wonder. It is both extraordinary and, in a sense, quite ordinary.

It is extraordinary in that it reminds us of the profound impact of 50 years of practice in Minnesota, thanks to the great efforts of our founders and many, many others. Zen practice at MZMC has deeply affected thousands of lives for the better.

As the first Zen Center in the Midwest, MZMC has had, and continues to have, an important role in defining American Zen.

The marking of 50 years also has an ordinary aspect. Our practice reminds us that Zen is about everydayness. With respect to our celebration, it's about preparing the grounds and the food and sending the invitations. More broadly, it's about our daily practice, steady meditation, mindful work, and an openness to just fully being present with whatever the universe presents to us.

As we enjoy this special occasion, connecting with friends old and new, may we remember the efforts of innumerable beings that have brought us to this point. May we be reminded of the steady practice, day-in, day-out, that has allowed for this extraordinary, ordinary 50 year anniversary to happen.

May this occasion be an opportunity to renew our vows to save all beings, and to continue this work far into future.

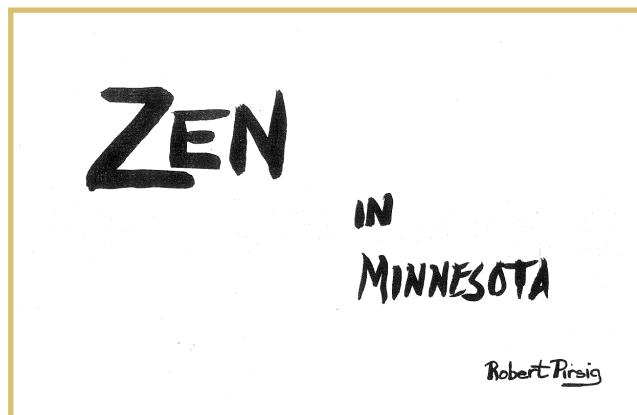
Ted O'Toole, Guiding Teacher

Zen Buddhism in Minnesota

“A historic step forward in the growth of Zen Buddhism in America has been the establishment of the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center in Minneapolis. It is the first time in the entire region between New York and California that an ordained Zen Master has taken up permanent residence for the teaching of Zen. The problems faced are great, but it is hoped that in time both the Midwest and Zen practice will benefit from the cultural exchange.

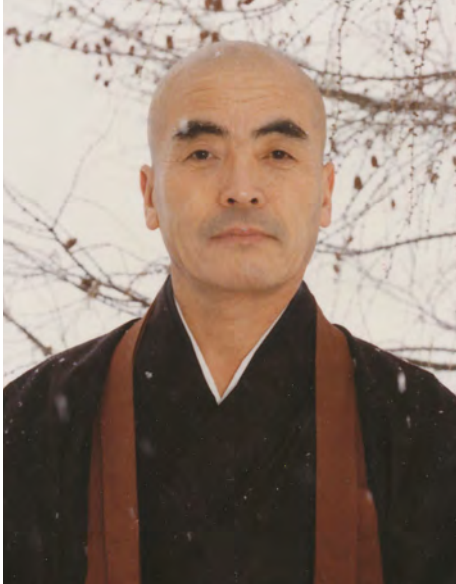
Zen Buddhism has come to Minnesota not as an exotic Japanese flower to be stared at and admired from a distance. Neither has it been brought here to impose Oriental (sic) manners and modes of thought upon an established American pattern of life. Organized Zen is here in Minnesota for the first time to enrich the lives of Minnesotans and they are now lived, with the increased awareness of each moment in the lives that Zen practice can give.”

— Robert Pirsig, circa 1972



[Read the full booklet here](#)

Honoring the Founding Teachers of the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center



Dainin Katagiri Roshi

In honoring the 50th anniversary of Minnesota Zen Meditation Center, we honor its founder, Dainin Katagiri, who was born in Japan, came to the United States in 1965, and arrived in Minnesota in 1972, where he founded MZMC, as well as Hokyoji Zen Practice Community. Katagiri was deeply loved during his lifetime. He also had human failings and left a complex legacy. He has had a profound impact on American Zen, though his teachings, his writing, and the many priests and Zen centers that trace their origins to him. View the Katagiri lineage chart [here](#).

Explore the link below for more information on Katagiri including a biography, books, photos, videos, and an audio archive project. Hokyoji Zen Practice Community is now an independent non-profit organization flourishing in Eitzen, Minnesota. Learn more [here](#).

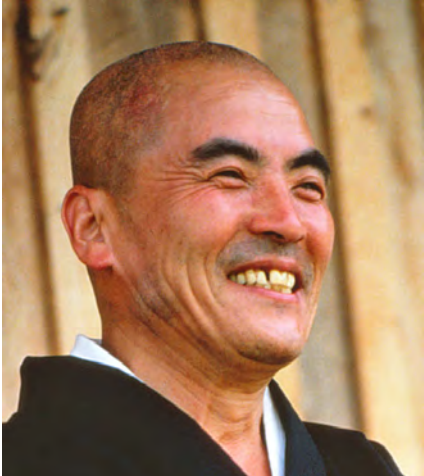


Tomoe Katagiri

Tomoe Katagiri began teaching the sewing of Zen robes, Nyoho-e, in 1970 at San Francisco Zen Center, having received the true teaching of the practice from Eshun Yoshida. She moved to Minnesota with her husband Dainin Katagiri and two boys in 1972, helped to found Minnesota Zen Meditation Center, and taught sewing at MZMC until her retirement in 2011.

Explore the link below and read more about Tomoe Katagiri and her work in two wonderful articles. You may also look her book *Study of the Okesa, Nyohō-e: Buddha's Robe*, which continues to be a valuable guide for many. Learn more [here](#).

Honoring the Guiding Teachers of the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center



Dainin Katagiri | 1972 – 1991

Read a biography of Katagiri Roshi [here](#).



Shohaku Okumura | 1992 – 1995

Okumura Roshi is founder and abbot of Sanshin Zen Community. Read more [here](#).



Karen Sunna | 1996 – 2002

Karen Sunna is a Dharma Heir of Katagiri Roshi and currently lives in Arizona.

Honoring the Guiding Teachers of the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center



Tim Burkett | 2002 – 2019

Tim Burkett is currently a Senior Teacher at MZMC. [Read more here.](#)

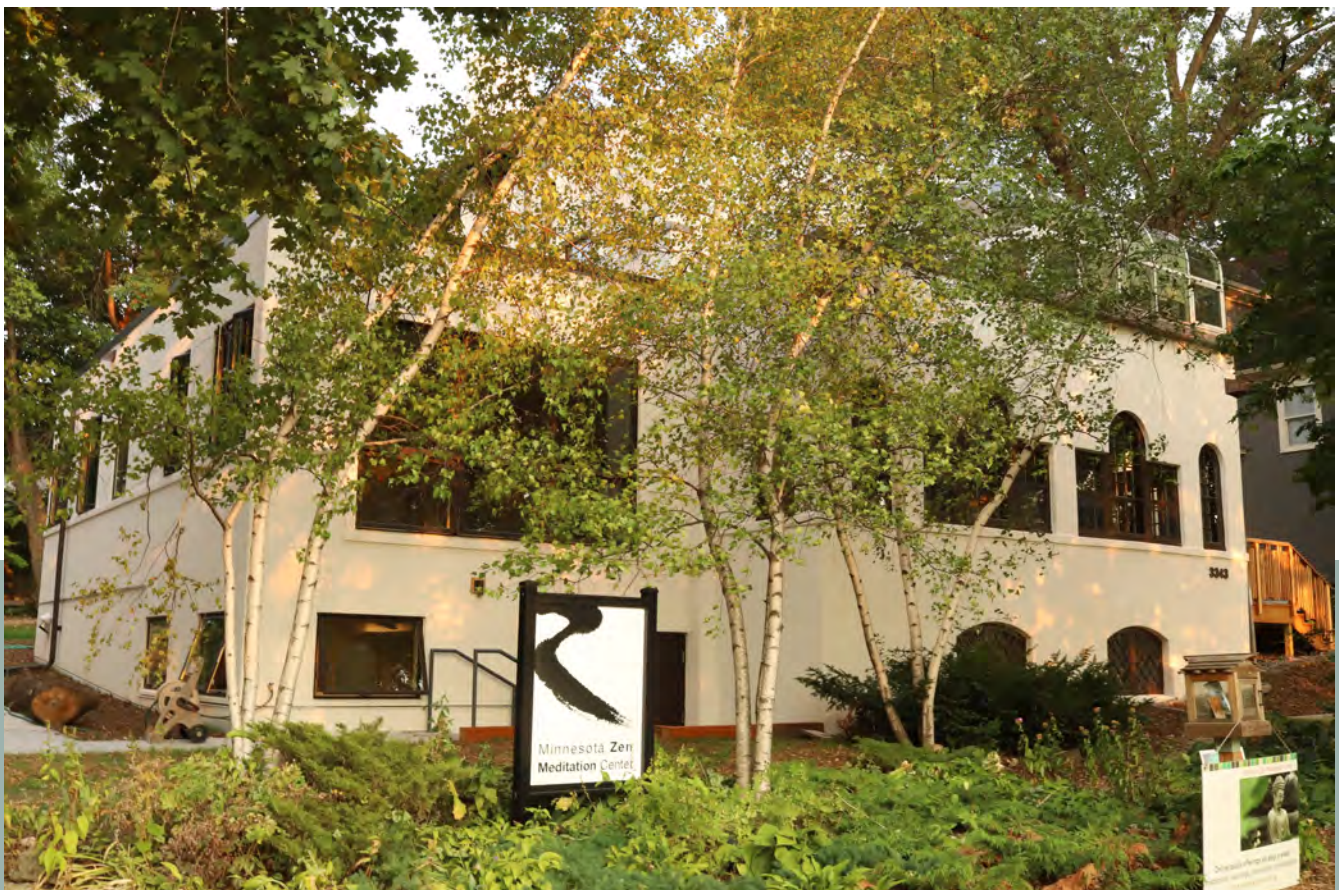


Ted O'Toole | 2019 – Present

Ted O'Toole is Guiding Teacher of MZMC. [Read more here.](#)

Our Lakeside Home in the City

Kounzan Ganshoji
(Cultivating Clouds Mountain, Living in Vow Temple)



Early History of Our Building

“As Katagiri drew more students, the group outgrew its apartment zendo. Meanwhile, Bob Pirsig’s book *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* had become a best seller. Pirsig and his wife Nancy James generously offered Zen Center a gift of \$20,000 from the book’s royalties, to go toward purchase of a building. Another sangha family offered to make a \$10,000 low-interest loan, and the group began their search for a new location.”



“What they found was “Vista del Lago,” a colonial Spanish-style white stucco house located on a triple lot at 3343 East Calhoun Parkway (now Bde Maka Ska Parkway) in south Minneapolis, overlooking picturesque Lake Calhoun (now Bde Maka Ska). Built in 1905 by Dr. M. Russell Wilcox after his wife fell in love with the Spanish style of architecture on a trip to Spain, the next owners were the Saul and Louise Rusoff. The Rusoffs were a civic-minded family and owners of the American Bindery in Minneapolis. Daughter Marly Rusoff tells that the family decided to sell the home after Saul died from cancer in July 1968. But their realtor, hoping to buy it himself for a low price, never listed it. It was the only house on the parkway with a curb cut for a driveway and he intended to build a high rise on the property. But when neighbors protested that plan, the property was sold to the House of Icarus, a center serving people in recovery from substance use challenges. When MZMC began searching for a new location, this property was again for sale.”

“On May 30, 1975, after additional fundraising and securing a mortgage for the rest of the \$60,000 purchase price, Zen Center bought the building. Eight months of renovations later, on February 1, 1976, Katagiri Roshi happily performed an opening ceremony for the new zendo. Zen practice got underway on the main floor and the Katagiri family moved into their new living quarters on the two upper floors.”

—From *Ceaseless Effort: The Life of Dainin Katagiri* by Andrea Martin

[Read more of the biography here.](#)

Minnesota Zen Meditation Center Today

Visitors who attend the 50th anniversary and haven't been to MZMC in a while will see that many things have changed. This is because we underwent a major and long-needed building renovation and addition in 2021 and 2022.

All of this required a massive effort on the part of the community. Then there was a capital campaign, extensive planning and working with professionals, the construction phase, cleaning the entire building to prepare for moving back in, and setting up new spaces.



A special gassho to all of the many community members and friends whose generous contributions helped make the vision a reality for our current and future sangha. They enabled us to meet our three project goals of stewardship, expansion, and accessibility.

Most of the effort took place during the pandemic. We were faced with moving all programming online, and then, upon moving back into the building, learning how to provide hybrid programming that was simultaneously available in person and online. Our success with this effort has been a testament to the strength of our community, our friends, and our practice.

It has been a joy to be in our newly renovated building, as well as to stay connected with our many new long-distance members who participate in practice online.

See photos of the building project [here](#).

The Minnesota Zen Meditation Center Sangha Through the Years

The Early Years in Minneapolis



[More photos from the 1970s](#)



[More photos from the 1980s](#)

Practice at Hokyoji in Rural Minnesota



[More photos from Hokyoji](#)



Photos by Members

See all photos from members



Poems by Members

Read more on our shared-memory blog and add your own poems.

Hokyoji by Amy Knox

This breath.

Collective breath- holding each other.

Feet, dew, tiny orange mushrooms, bird song, moon, mosquitos.

Palms, ten fingers, finger pads with rings of trees cradling the simple bowl.

Knot by Amy Knox

A knot threaded in pain.

A seed that contributed to how my life has grown.

Aching, I glance up at the moon,
and eventually breathe the moon in.

Setting the compass – saying yes to sewing.

Forehead to the ground and palms lifted for what is here.

Seeing and touching is profound gift.

Caressing the knot sewn into my being.

No longer frozen and so heavily guarded.

At times, soft like warm clay.

The knot a drop in the human ocean.

In seeing and touching, the heart mends.

Like a Kintsugi bowl knit tenderly in golden repair.

With this heart, I walk out into my day.

This patchwork heart, the imperfect offering I make.

Washing Dishes by Ji'un Ken DKM

I've been sitting in meditation for years,

My life doesn't feel like a burned-out basement,

Or a scorched pot anymore.

On a grassy hilltop,

Discussing the Dharma with Dogen and Ryokan,

I hear the old woman in the village yell,

"Get down here and help wash the dishes!"

Three Poems by Ji'un Ken DKM

Trudging up the hill
Against icy wind and sleet
3 crows flying south

Long shadows walking
Morning winter sun shines bright
Chickadee dee dee

So hungry last night
Ate painting of a rice cake
Now fully at ease

Six Poems by Ted O'Toole

Gatha

As I raise the blinds
May all beings
Raise the Blinds

Running walking riding
Skating strolling cellphoning
Buddhas every one

Rhododendron
Old friend
I've haikued you before

The wind howls
Around the house
Where no one lives

Poetry table
June day
Pleasant without customers

Frog

The frog
With its bellyful of flies
Is a sleepy master
Of all it wishes to see

Three Untitled Poems by Matt Streit

Cool breeze off the lake
August in Minnesota
Despair approaches

Leaves fall
And join the soil below
From that soil
Comes new life in the spring

Why do we think we're so special?
We in turn will become compost
Our death will make room for other
So they can make their own mistakes too

Early Morning, Misty Pond by Kent Elliott Allen

Early morning, misty pond.
An old turtle lies below,
One eye watching the pillowing air.
A flashing shadow,
A heron glides low,
A downy feather drifts on a breeze.

The Pond in Late Summer by Kent Elliott Allen

In the late summer heat
The pond churns.
Insects dart
Birds swoop
Fish flash and splash
Surface swirls mark unseen struggles below.
Everybody's eating.

Untitled by Whitney Tope

Together entwined
We remain each who we are
One? Each? Yes and No

Untitled by Ted O'Toole

I realize just today
That my hand
Is beginning to look
Like my grandfather's

Blue veins
Thin skin
Stretched over bone

It's nice
To see him again

Share Your Photos, Memories, and Poems

We want to hear your memories of the
Minnesota Zen Meditation Center over the last fifty years!

Visit www.mnzencenter.org/50th-anniversary-memories
to share your thoughts.

