



## Betty J. Kempf

August 29, 1938 - April 10, 2025

Betty Kempf, 86 of Kearney passed away Thursday, April 10, 2025 at her home surrounded by family. Memorial services are 10:00 a.m. Thursday, May 15, 2025 at First Lutheran Church with Rev. Dr. Michelle Holley Carlson and Rev. Dr. Rick Carlson officiating. Interment will follow at the First Lutheran Church Columbarium.

Betty was born August 29, 1938 in Minden, Nebraska. She was the only daughter and the fourth of five children of Nels and Luella (Meyer) Tomsen. The family lived southeast of Minden, on a farm that was homesteaded in 1887 by Betty's paternal grandfather, Anton Tomsen.

Betty attended Minden public schools in grades kindergarten through 12 and graduated in 1956 with a class of 46 members. After high school she attended the University of Nebraska at Lincoln where she began her education to become a teacher. She transferred to UNK in 1959 and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Education in January, 1960. She also earned her Master of Education Degree in Counseling in 1964 and her Specialist Degree in School Psychology in 1977 from UNK.

Betty was a public school educator in Iowa for one year and in Nebraska for 31 years. She began her career as an English teacher, then became a school counselor, and then was the first full-time school psychologist for the Kearney

public schools. She retired in 1997.

Betty joined the Gamma Phi Beta sorority at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln in 1957. In 1963 she worked with five other women to colonize the Gamma Kappa Chapter of Gamma Phi Beta at UNK. In order to do this, a requirement was the establishment of a local alumni group. Betty served as this group's first chairperson and was active in the local and national organization throughout her life. She was proud to have her three daughters, two granddaughters and a niece also join her sorority.

Betty and Fred met while attending Summer session classes at Kearney State College (now UNK) in 1962. At that time Betty was teaching in Kearney and Fred was teaching in Arnold, Nebraska. They were married June 6, 1963. They both received Master's Degrees in the summer of 1964 and moved to North Platte, Nebraska where they were counselors from 1964 to 1967 before moving to Iowa City. They returned to Kearney in 1969 and it has been their home since that time.

Betty was a life-long Lutheran. She was baptized, confirmed and married at Fredericksburg Lutheran Church in rural Kearney County and became a member of First Lutheran in Kearney in 1969. She was a member of Gloria Circle from its beginning and served two terms as the President of the First Lutheran Women. She was an active participant in the Nebraska Synodical Women's Organization and in weekend servant retreats of the Saved to Serve group where she made many friends with Lutheran women from across Nebraska.

She also enjoyed UNK Faculty Wives and the Red Hat Society. Betty helped to establish the Betty Group in Kearney—no Elizabeths allowed, and helped organize a statewide conference of women named Betty. She enjoyed cooking for others, was an avid gardener, and loved playing Some-R-Set with

family and Bridge with friends. Grandparenting was her favorite hobby. She built strong bonds with her daughters and their families who will forever remember her playful nature and love for her family. Betty and Fred's 60th Anniversary weekend in June 2023 was a special memory as family traveled from near and far to attend.

Betty is preceded in death by her parents, Nels and Luella Tomsen; and brothers, Donald, Willis (Tiny), Charles, and Jim. She is survived by her husband, Fred, of 62 years, daughters Kimberly Leonard (Charlie), Kathryn Smith (Greg), Amy Graham (Brian); grandchildren Tomsen Leonard (Caitlin), Russell Leonard, Bryce Smith, Nicole Smith, Kari Smith, Abigail Graham, Zoe Graham, Corbin Graham (Malarie), and great granddaughter, Raenie Graham.

Memorials are suggested to the First Lutheran Church or to the "Kempf Family Scholarship for Gamma Kappa Chapter of Gamma Phi Beta at UNK." Please have the checks made out to the University of Nebraska Foundation, 2204 University Drive, Suite 103, Kearney, NE 68845 with "in memory of Betty Kempf" in the memo. Condolences may be shared online at [www.osrfh.com](http://www.osrfh.com). Services are entrusted to O'Brien Straatmann Redinger Funeral and Cremation Services.

# Previous Events

## Memorial Service

MAY 15. 10:00 AM (CT)

First Lutheran Church  
3315 Ave G  
Kearney, NE 68847

# Tribute Wall

YN

“ Your friends at Dzenitis Newman purchased the Florist Choice Bouquet for the family of Betty J. Kempf.



Your friends at Dzenitis Newman - May 14, 2025 at 03:05 PM

YN

“ Your friends at Dzenitis Newman planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Betty J. Kempf.

Your friends at Dzenitis Newman - May 14, 2025 at 03:05 PM

CK

“ Craig & Lori Kidd purchased the Florist Choice Bouquet for the family of Betty J. Kempf.



Craig & Lori Kidd - May 13, 2025 at 05:05 PM



“ Beautiful Dreams was purchased for the family of Betty J. Kempf.



May 11, 2025 at 01:55 PM



“ Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Betty J. Kempf.



April 24, 2025 at 09:09 AM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Betty J. Kempf.

April 24, 2025 at 09:09 AM



“ Aunt Betty held my hand tightly in the dark on open passenger train from Iowa to Nebraska in the early 60s as my parents were moving again with the military. I'll never forget her gentle yet firm kindness.

*She was and will always be a wonder woman among many.*

*With heartfelt love to Uncle Fred and All the Family,*

*All the best, Karla Tomsen*

**Karla Tomsen** - April 23, 2025 at 05:17 PM



“ Country Basket Blooms was purchased for the family of Betty J. Kempf.



April 23, 2025 at 12:35 PM

RD

“ Rose Denness lit a candle in memory of Betty J. Kempf



Rose Denness - April 19, 2025 at 04:35 PM

RD

“ Roselle D. purchased a sympathy card for the family of Betty J. Kempf.



Roselle D. - April 19, 2025 at 04:33 PM

KR

“ Betty was a gracious "pioneer" in her field. Her leadership at First Lutheran I appreciated greatly.



Kathy Campbell RN - April 19, 2025 at 01:12 PM

KH

“ I just loved, Betty. She was so good to my kids when they were growing up. She got them gifts on holidays and wuld spend time listening to all of my kids questions. They were talkers. I told Betty to just cut them off. lol But she didn't. Betty was also a friend of my mom's, as they were neighbors. May she rest in peace.

Krista Huerta - April 18, 2025 at 02:22 PM



“ *Betty was one of the first to welcome us to Pony Express Rd when we moved in  
We had fun sharing memories and playing bridge  
Will miss this lovely women my friend  
Sincerely Colleen*

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**Colleen Gage** - April 12, 2025 at 05:27 PM