

**Annual Report of the Minister**  
**To the Unitarian Universalist Society of Black Hawk County**  
**By Mark Allstrom**  
**March 31, 2005**

**Worship:** I presided over six Sunday services after the 2004 Annual Meeting (April 18) and before our Summer Services began (June 27). Since I was not taking my vacation until January, I preached for most of our summer services (six of the eight) and in so doing experimented in making them “more like normal services” and less like discussions, that is, complete with sermon, meditation and music. However we did include discussion portions which were more familiar summer fare. The format of these services then served as the model for the 9am services which began with the new church year on August 22.

But early on I felt preaching the same sermon for the two services was a hindrance. Personally, I felt bored doing the same sermon twice, but also preaching two different sermons allowed for a wider exploration of topics and eventually seemed to help create a varied atmosphere in the two services. I also found I could experiment with delivery styles. I started preaching different sermons on September 5 (although on September 12 and October 24, the topics were important enough to warrant using the same sermon twice).

From August 22 through December 26, I led 24 Sunday services at UUSBHC on 13 Sundays and one (with the help of the Sunday Services Committee) on Christmas Eve. I also preached at the Decorah Fellowship on December 5.

During my vacation I spoke at the Unitarian Church of South Australia, the Shady Grove Unitarian Chapel and the Ullet Road (Liverpool) Unitarian Church. I also preached at the Kensington (London) church on April 18, 2004.

I resumed here on February 6 and between then and the writing of this report, I preached 12 sermons over six Sundays. So between April 18, 2004 and April 17, 2005 Annual Meetings (including the next four sermons over the three Sundays before the Annual Meeting), I will have preached 52 times at UUSBHC over 34 Sundays and six times at other times or locations. I also participated in two flower communions, two New Member Welcoming services, two naming ceremonies, two union services, four weddings (one in Australia), and two memorial services.

Due to scheduling conflicts, I urged naming two members of the congregation as marriage celebrants to cover weddings to which the professional minister could not commit. John Miller and Sue Hill were so named in December.

I am very grateful for all the help people put in, especially with the changes necessitated by the change to the two services format and especially for those who volunteered to lead and/or organize services with me or in my absence.

We will return to a one-service format after Memorial Day weekend because we suspect attendances will drop then. I think it worked well and it relieved the seating capacity problem. I do not know if the new minister will want to continue it. It will be up to her and the Sunday Services Committee. But I count as one of the great successes of the last year that this congregation was flexible enough to experiment with it.

**Adult Religious Education:** The Adult RE this church offers is one of the best programs I've seen and I was pleased to participate in it with three UU History conversations and workshops on Assimilation and on Outreach. I also spoke once with the Youth Group.

**Conferences and Colleagues:** I attended the British Unitarian conference in Chester and the Prairie Star District meeting in Kansas City. I also attended two district UU Ministers Association meetings and four meetings with the Iowa Cluster of UU Ministers.

**Committees:** I met with the following committees: Outreach (2), Social Action (3), Caring (4), Search (2), Sunday Services (7), RE (3), COM (6), and joint meetings of COM and RE and of COM and Board. From August through December the DRE participated in COM meetings. I am pleased with the RE Committee reorganization. The cable-TV Social Action project will begin soon. I am very grateful to all those who worked on these and the other committees of this church.

**Pastoral:** I made 25 Hospital visits, 91 pastoral visits and 84 social visits.

**Miscellaneous:** I gave a presentation at the Cedar Falls Museum and at the Kiwanis group.

I involved myself in the geo-index debate with the district's consultant because I thought it reflected poorly and unjustly on this congregation. But I was very pleased in how the Search Committee and the Board created a very positive outcome.

**Suggestions:** I am pleased that the church seems to demonstrate more flexibility with less anxiety than what I found at first. The willingness to experiment will be vital when the new minister arrives.

I think we were able to improve our image in the district and, by extension, in the denomination. In so doing I believe we demonstrated the value of continually setting goals beyond what we have already achieved. But I am concerned there's still not much participation in district and denominational activities. I think the "road trips" that the Allstroms and Zeitzes went on were productive on a variety of levels and I was pleased that five or six of us appeared at the Kansas City District meeting and. But I don't believe anyone went to the 2005 district meeting. Also there is an excellent opportunity for training and connecting with other congregations at the district's annual leadership school (and, I believe, some funding available as well), yet there's been no interest. I know people are busy but a congregation which wants

to be involved in denominational activities would arrange the means.

I am concerned that the right hand sometimes doesn't know or doesn't care what the left-hand is doing. This is a matter of sharing information but also a matter of consistently and intentionally tying programs and approaches together. In a larger church this might be done with the Committee Council. As it is, it is done through the Board. It is my opinion it is not necessarily the Board's job and keeping tabs on what the committees do consumes a lot of Board time as it threatens to rob the committees of the responsibility to do their assigned jobs which in turn hinders their enthusiasm. Yet there needs to be a clear way of the committees to tie their various programs together.

While the RE program has achieved a lot in the last year or two, especially in organizing itself, there could be problems in the future. It is organized well; I'm just concerned the ongoing volunteerism is tenuous. This is strange to me because the congregation generally affirms its commitment to its youth and children's programs, yet volunteerism and enthusiasm for these programs seems lacking at times.

I suggest that the Board organize and utilize the archives better. Sometimes there's confusion or, simply, ignorance concerning your past.

I suggest the Board and committees engage in conflict management. I sense sometimes that people don't know how conflicts get out of hand and how they can so easily contribute to that.

I suggest that the minister not be expected to take out the garbage and I am concerned that lights and heaters are sometimes left on and the door sometimes left open overnight.

I suggest that a long-term goal be established of hiring an Administrative Assistant.

