

## **COVENANT RENEWAL: I AM ASC**

**By Harlow Robinson**

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Preachers run in my family.

My mother's father served as pastor of the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Dorchester, and later of a congregation in Winchester, MA. He died of a botched gall bladder operation when my mother was 13. An only child, she never got over the double trauma of losing her father and being evicted with her mother from their parsonage home. Had to make room for the next pastor.

Much further back, my ninth-generation grandfather, John Robinson, was a theologian and rabble-rouser. Born in 1576 in Nottinghamshire, England, he led a group that separated from the Church of England and came to be known as the Pilgrims. Persecuted and unable to worship freely in England, they sought refuge in the more tolerant Netherlands. They settled in Leyden, living communally like hippies. But the Pilgrims feared losing their identity among the Dutch and decided to move on.

John Robinson didn't sail with them on the Mayflower from Delftshaven, bound for the New World in 1620. He stayed behind with some other Pilgrims. John might not have made it to the New World, but his teachings were fundamental to the creation of the Massachusetts colony. To his credit, he advised that it was probably better to convert the native Americans than kill them.

But John Robinson wasn't a touchy-feely guy. Here, for example, is his advice on child-rearing: "And surely there is in

all children....a stubbornness, and stoutness of mind arising from natural pride, which must, in the first place, be broken and beaten down.”

Perhaps this helps to explain why my own parents and their parents were not always the most flexible of folks. My father’s grandparents, New Hampshire people with granite in their veins, viewed card-playing as a sin. My parents were seriously church-going, to the First Congregational Church in a small Connecticut city. Underpaid teachers, they sacrificed much to raise me and my brothers.

When I announced clumsily sometime in my 20s over the telephone from California that I was gay, they didn’t take it too well. My mother cried. My father wrote in a letter that “We don’t understand how you could *choose* such a sordid lifestyle.” Over time they came around a few degrees. But my mother still feared what her church lady friends would think whenever my partner—now husband—Robert and I would show up at a service at holidays.

Living the transitory existence of an eternal student in godless San Francisco and later in New York, for years I had no connection to a spiritual community. My life was too “Bohemian”—as one friend politely described it—to be contained within the walls of a church. And I certainly never entertained the idea of giving *money* to a church.

Until I came to ASC, that is. As my husband Robert told you last week, we discovered this community on Christmas Eve 1997 when I sang here with the Gay Men’s Chorus. Wow. We felt not just tolerated, but celebrated. A few years later we joined as members.

I give to ASC because I want to support this community that has embraced me and my husband. Because we could be

married here with friends and family in attendance. Because I believe in the progressive political and social agenda that ASC promotes. Because I like the music. Because I love this historic and beautiful space. Because I admire the Tiffany windows. Because I always learn something new from Kim's sermons. Because I like lunch downstairs with the friends we have made here.

Because in giving I receive so much.

In this season of covenant renewal, I urge you to do the same.

ASC welcomes all with open arms and hearts—especially refugees from other faiths. My stern rebellious forefather John Robinson could surely relate to that.

Thank you.