

Robert Holley - ASC Pulpit talk April 18, 2015

My first introduction to Arlington Street Church was on Christmas Eve 1997. My then longtime companion/now husband and I had moved to Boston from New York earlier that year, knowing hardly a soul. Upon arriving in Massachusetts, Harlow had joined the Gay Men's Chorus and that Christmas Eve was his first concert with the group.

I stood in line outdoors in the bitter cold and got one of the few remaining seats on the main floor for the 7:00 Service. I had never been to a Unitarian Universalist church before, and had no idea of what to expect. It was dark out, so you couldn't see the windows very well, and the sanctuary, though impressive with these incredible Corinthian columns, was dingy and not a little threadbare. This was before the capital campaign that restored the interior here to what you see today.

And then the Gay Men's Chorus sang. And there were drag queens! And Candles! In Church! On Christmas Eve! I can remember saying to myself at the time, "Who KNEW there were such people?!"

Over the next few years, we attended from time-to-time, then with increasing frequency, but generally avoided coffee hour altogether. Neither of us had ever been much in the way of joiners, and we certainly were not devout.

We had met in New York City and lived there during the 1980s just as what would become the AIDS pandemic was gaining a foothold. As our friends were dying all around us, every Sunday Cardinal O'Connor would proclaim from the steps of St Patrick's Cathedral that AIDS was God's punishment and that we were all going to hell. So, as you might imagine, joining a church, any church, was simply out-of-the-question.

Then Life, as it sometimes has a way of doing, went completely haywire. I'll spare you the details, but suffice to say, I found myself in the detox unit at Faulkner Hospital in May of 2002. I had pretty-much ruined my health, my career, nearly all of my friendships, not to mention my primary relationship of more than 20 years. And, at the time, I had no idea how any of it had happened.

One of the first things I remember hearing at the AA meetings that I began attending after I was discharged was that the quality of my sobriety (and thus my life) would depend directly on the strength of my spiritual condition. What spiritual condition? I had no idea what this meant. But I didn't want to take any chances.

So longing for something better, both Harlow and I joined ASC that spring. Two years later, things had improved enough that I was healthier and I was beginning to feel as though I might have a sprit after all. So much so, in fact, that Rev Kim agreed to marry us right here.

Since that day, we've continued to come to ASC, and over the years, have become more involved with volunteering for the Church, increasing our pledge each year when we could, and over time have, have not only grown to feel a "part of", but have made deep friendships which I know will be with us the rest of our lives.

"Who KNEW there were such people?!"

So, why do I give to ASC? First, for me this is the spiritual gymnasium, if you will, where I work to strengthen and condition my spirit, and thereby have a chance at living a useful and productive life. Secondly, I make a pledge each year because it feels good, and, I can tell you from experience, the more you give, the better it feels.

There's a wonderful passage in AA literature that talks about sobriety as opening a door to a new life. It tells us that the key to the door is willingness, and that over the doorway there is an inscription that reads, "This is the way to a faith that works." I've often thought that inscription ought to be over the great doorway that opens onto Arlington Street.

That's how it happened for me. Thank you.