

The Rev. Sven L. vanBaars - Biography -

With a name like mine, people usually expect to meet someone who is tall, blonde, and has an accent. Except for my Virginia accent, I don't meet those expectations. I am 5th generation Norfolk County and 1st generation American. My mother's family has deep roots in southeast Virginia and my father immigrated to this country to serve in the US Navy. I grew up in Chesapeake, and our family went to the Presbyterian Church that my great grandfather had helped found. I tell people we went regularly – "Christmas, Easter, and whenever grandma took us." Religion was not a priority in my parents' lives.

It was during college that I began to assume responsibility for my faith. A seminal moment for me was being cast in a community theatre production of Godspell. Matthew's Gospel, on which the script is based, was unfamiliar to me. It was intriguing and lively. Rehearsals were held at the local Episcopal Church. I first met the Episcopal Church in the parish hall and at the Christmas Eve midnight Mass.

My first job after graduation was in northeastern NC. I attended the Presbyterian Church. I wasn't fitting in but I wasn't yet ready to give up on the denomination of my family. One Sunday I was sitting in my car on the street in front of the church waiting for the last possible moment to go in when I saw something two blocks away. I left the car to see what was happening. Several churches were gathering in a parking lot for the Blessings of the Palms. I didn't know what Palm Sunday was. When the blessing ended, I followed the cross to St. Thomas' Episcopal Church. It was there that I met my future wife and there that I was confirmed. I only went back to the Presbyterian Church to get my car.

Shortly after our marriage, Jen and I moved because of my work and became active in a small congregation near Harrisonburg, VA. In the years there I took on almost every lay position and became aware of the role a diocese plays in the life of a congregation. I joined a diocesan committee and would consult with parishes about their giving and pledging programs. This gave me a breadth of understanding for parishes of varied sizes and liturgical styles.

In 2006, I ended my first career and attended seminary full-time, graduating in 2008. In my ordained ministry, I have served two parishes. I find great joy in being a priest. Walking with people in their faith; being present in Word and Sacrament for life moments; and empowering the church to be the body of Christ call upon gifts that I have. It has also caused me to develop new gifts and to strengthen others.

I find strength in several places. My daily prayer routine grounds me. My colleague group and spiritual director provide places for on-going discernment and support. My marriage is a profound source of strength.