

The Rev. Sven L. vanBaars

- Sense of Call -

I learned to swim in the murky, moving waters of the Chowan River when I was 8. My older brother had tried to teach me earlier. In a swimming pool he had demonstrated what to do and then attempted to cajole me to do the same. It didn't work. His promise that I could cling to the side of the pool didn't comfort me. In the chlorine pool water, I could see the deep bottom and was fearful. One summer I was visiting my cousins. They would swim in the river and would have such a good time. It was their joy that called me. The depth of the water didn't matter. Although I knew they were there, the challenges that lay beneath the surface were out of sight and I waded in. My cousin mentored me in what to do. I waded in further. A few strokes. A few lessons. The water got deeper, and I began to swim.

The waters of Baptism call us into a new way of life. Learning to swim allows us to move through life in a new way. For me call is like learning to swim. We can be overwhelmed by the fear of all that is known and because of fear we can refuse to allow ourselves to move. We can also focus on the joy of call and allow that joy to pull us deeper and deeper into ministry.

My own call to ministry was first felt in lay ministries. I saw the joy that Lay Eucharistic Ministers exhibited in the liturgy; the pleasure that youth leaders took in their members; the quiet satisfaction that altar guild members had in their tasks. My call to ordained ministry was surprisingly spoken years before I pursued it. Frankly, it frightened me and I needed to wade in deeper before I could see the joy that it would bring.

My sense of call that has caused me to put my name forward to be Bishop of Southern Virginia follows this pattern. For six years I worked daily with three Bishops and saw the hard work they did and I also experienced the joy they brought to and received from their ministries. I have served as an intake officer for Title IV complaints and know the ministry of a Bishop has very difficult responsibilities. Having worked in your diocese; having served on the board of Chanco; and having read your very thorough profile, I think I have an awareness of the challenges that need to be faced by your next Bishop. But it is still the sense of joy I have when I pray for guidance in this calling that calls me to go deeper, to learn how to move in ministry in a new way.