

from the **Director's Corner**

Letter from Dr. Gilbert

2007

Again, welcome to our site.

Last spring, the Institute for Church Professions at Shenandoah University asked if it would be possible to host Extraordinary Leadership Seminars.

Shenandoah University is a United Methodist school. The United Methodists, in the person of Lucy Marsden Hottle, originally saw the need for such a program. The U.M. Virginia Conference backed the idea from the beginning. It found financial support for virtually all who applied from the Conference, to subsidize their tuition. They continually publicized the program by listing it on their approved list for lifelong learning (Clergy Development Program).

Three years ago, Gwen Purushotham, in the national United Methodist headquarters in Nashville, began promoting the seminars for attendance by district superintendents. Again, financial support was made available.

At the same time, the seminar has never been appropriated by any one denomination. While the United Methodists were responsible for its inception and also for so much of its growth, they were also in agreement with me that any appropriate clergy person be included, regardless of denomination or faith. Shenandoah Presbytery later began a program that was also inclusive of all clergy. It has met for three years in Harrisonburg, VA—one year in Sunnyside Retirement Center and the last two at Eastern Mennonite University.

However, in view of the tremendous United Methodist support in so many ways, it did seem most appropriate when Rhonda VanDyke Colby, Dean of Spiritual Life (then the Director of the Institute for Church Professions), at Shenandoah University, asked if we might be interested in a new home. "What would it take?" she asked. So began the conversations that culminated in beginning a new era for Extraordinary Leadership Seminars.

It was an exciting invitation that Rhonda and I both believed would open new doors, both for the University and for the Seminars. The University would gain the advantage of clergy from all denominations and faiths visiting the campus on a regular basis. This would mean that students would be able to see them and get to know them—perhaps even as friends and mentors, in time.

Dr. Bowen said many times in my hearing that he thought that Bowen family systems theory would fare better in a university setting than not. When Georgetown University became untenable as a home, in 1990, the Georgetown Family Center (now the Bowen Center for the Study of the Family) had become a free standing institution.

By going into academia, the Extraordinary Leadership arm of Bowen theory will continue his vision. I believe this move will indeed open new doors for all concerned. For a university to welcome Bowen theory into its midst, many lives can be influenced. Of course, this is a welcome credential for the seminars. Halfway between Harrisonburg and Falls Church, the new Winchester location means that the two local monthly seminars can be combined into one. More facilities, connections, resources and energetic people all help put the seminars on a more solid trajectory for the future. We have been warmly welcomed from several quarters.

I look forward to the new year with eager anticipation.

Sincerely yours,

Roberta Gilbert