

Gettysburg seminarians face Greek 'boot camp'

GETTYSBURG, Pa. (AP) — At this site of one of the Civil War's bloodiest battles, it is New Testament Greek, not military strategy, that is on the minds of 30 first-year students at the Lutheran Theological Seminary.

The road to becoming a minister starts with boot camp.

"It's like a big game," said Kathy Rohrbach, after spending 90 minutes learning about such concepts as the 24 different ways to say "the," depending on the gender, number, and case of the noun it precedes. The students also learned that "saint," "sanctified," and "holy," are from the same Greek root.

Professor Rick Carlson prods Rohrbach and her classmates and uses references to Billy Joel songs and the 1970s television program "Happy Days," to help students with their pronunciation. But he also has a serious side.

"Don't try to find all the deep theological meaning here," he advised the students on Tuesday morning, the third day of what will be a two-week class. He then urged them to focus on learning the Greek vocabulary, and save the Biblical analysis and interpretation for later.

Rohrbach, who is beginning her training after previous careers as a university administrator and director of Christian education at a church, took notes furiously

while shuffling flash cards she had prepared with key words.

But the actual language study was not the hardest thing for her. She said the real challenge is finding the hours to study while balancing her responsibilities to her husband and children and driving two hours each day to school.

Her classmate Mary Love, who held flash cards during practice

sessions for students last year, said her study of German and Spanish made learning Greek easy. Love answered several of Carlson's questions correctly.

While Carlson's style is informal — he wore a sport shirt, shorts and sneakers and shuttled among three blackboards during class — his purpose is quite serious. He said after class that learning Greek will enable stu-

dents to understand the Bible better and explain it to their future congregants.

"It slows down the reading so you see the text as a video or drama. It can help you visualize the text because the words are dramatically charged," he said. "The majority of the students will be better equipped to get the images and theological dynamics that the text has."



AP Photo

Professor Rick Carlson lectures to his students during a Greek class at Gettysburg Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg, Pa. Tuesday, Aug. 24, 1999.

The road to becoming a minister starts with boot camp. Not to learn about military leadership but to learn about the rudiments of New Testament Greek.