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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

RUTH GRAHAM'S LIFE CELEBRATED BY HUSBAND, CHILDREN AND COMMUNITY OF FRIENDS

All Five Graham Siblings Participate in Funeral Program and Greet the Public At Close Of Service; All 19 Grandchildren Serve as Pallbearers

MONTREAT, N.C., June 16 – With her husband, Billy Graham, her older sister and five children participating in the program, and all 19 of her grandchildren serving as pallbearers or honorary pallbearers, Ruth Graham's life was celebrated at her public funeral today in the 2,000-seat Anderson Auditorium at the Montreat Conference Center filled to capacity with family members and friends from the local community.

The day began with a procession from the funeral home, where hundreds of local residents – from families with little children to the frail and elderly – lined the route to pay their respects to Mrs. Graham. Some stood with hands on hearts; others, including ranks of law enforcement and fire and rescue personnel, gave crisp salutes.

The funeral service began with a song by a special Memorial Chorale, swelled to a total of 70 local volunteers from the 20-member Montreat College choir, which honored Mrs. Graham's memory with several musical selections. Afterward, Dr. Richard White, Mrs. Graham's long-time pastor at Montreat Presbyterian Church, welcomed attendees.

"We gather today to say good-bye to truly a good servant, Ruth Bell Graham, but we also gather to say we believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord," he said before praying, "Our hearts are heavy with loss, yet we dare rejoice, for she is with You."

All of the Graham children participated in the funeral, with eldest daughter Virginia "Gigi" reading one of the family's favorite selections from Mrs. Graham's poetry, appropriate to her death, which begins, *"And when I die, I hope my soul ascends slowly, so that I may watch the earth receding out of sight, its vastness growing smaller as I rise, savoring its recession with delight."*

Mrs. Graham's daughter, Ruth, referenced her mother's childhood in China as preparation for the ministry she would have as the wife of a globe-trotting evangelist and mother of their five children. Their youngest son, Ned, read a selection favored by Mrs. Graham from a book of Puritan prayers, and his brother Franklin recalled some special memories of his mother.

"Mama was a lot of fun, but she also believed the Bible, lived the Bible and taught the Bible," Franklin said. "She believed Jesus Christ died for our sins, that He is in Heaven and will come back some day.

"Mama lived what she believed," he continued. "The mama we saw at home was the one the world saw -- there weren't two Ruth Grahams. Mama, thank you for your example, your love, your wit, your humor, your craziness – I love you for all of it and I'm going to miss you terribly."

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Daughter Anne spoke of her mother's love for their father and how she taught the children to love him, despite his long absences. "She loved our Daddy, but greater was her love for God. She taught us to love our Daddy and to love Jesus."

Anne then read a portion of Scripture from Romans chapter eight, prefaced by a note she found written by her mother and taped in that place in her mother's Bible, "Perhaps today some word will reach us that prepares us for our tomorrow," she read. "Let's not miss that word."

Mrs. Graham's older sister Rosa Montgomery also shared family memories, bringing a chuckle to the crowd as she stated that she and Ruth were both "made in China." Rosa had spent much of the last six months with Ruth reminiscing about their happy childhood. "Weren't we lucky to have such good parents?" she said they agreed, and spoke as well of Ruth's adventurous spirit, "If there was ever any damage done anywhere, you could be sure that Ruth was in the middle of it."

As his children finished speaking, Mr. Graham rose from his seat in the front row to bring an unscheduled greeting to the crowd. "I want to welcome all of you and thank you for coming," he said. "Ruth was an incredible woman; I wish you could look in her casket because she is so beautiful. I sat there a long time last night looking at her, and I prayed, because I knew she had a great reception in heaven."

"I wish I could stay and visit with each of you but I've got to go to Charlotte, where we will bury Ruth at the Library, and my own strength is limited," Mr. Graham added before joking, "God bless all these grandchildren – some of them I haven't seen in a long time and some I've never seen."

Upon leaving the service Mr. Graham said his sense of loss is beginning to sink in. He commented on the beauty of the service and the flowers, and said that he was pleased with the outpouring of public love and support and has been encouraged by the presence of his family at this time.

In his meditation, Dr. White spoke about sharing communion with the Graham family last January when Mrs. Graham was gravely ill, after which one of the children remarked how wonderful it was they could have this last time of communion together. He said that later Ruth sat up in her bed and said, "What is this, some kind of last rights?" and went on to live five more months. "That was classic Ruth Graham," he said.

"If you're here today and say, 'Ruth Graham was a great woman', you've missed the point of her life," Dr. White added. "The reason Ruth Graham was a great woman is because she had a great savior and a great love for Jesus Christ."

Dr. White spoke on Jesus' strikingly odd response of tears and anger at the funeral of his friend, Lazarus. "The tears were the tears of God for us -- your sadness touches Jesus; He knows your sorrows," he said, further explaining Jesus' anger was directed at death. "Jesus knows we were created to live, not die. Though we are powerless, He is able to do something about it."

Toward the end of the service, Franklin thanked the local volunteers for all their hard work in preparation for the service, adding that his father wanted him to thank his staff, who had worked so many months taking care of Mama. "They loved her, stayed up with her and helped her so many times," he said. "Thank you for the love you showed my mother."

Following the service, the five Graham siblings and their spouses remained behind to greet the public, before accompanying the funeral coach to Charlotte. Mrs. Graham's remains will lie in repose overnight at the newly dedicated Billy Graham Library, before being buried at a private, family-only interment ceremony Sunday at the foot of a cross-shaped walkway in the adjacent Prayer Garden.