

Graham family in dispute over burial site: Billy Graham Library or The Cove are considered

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Evangelist Franklin Graham said last month that the decision about where his parents will be buried is “personal” and he does not intend to enter a public debate about it. The word was out, however, that not all is settled.

Graham’s comments came after the *Washington Post* reported December 13 that he and his brother, Ned, do not agree about the location of the final resting place of their parents, Billy and Ruth Graham.

According to the *Post*, Ruth Graham biographer Patricia Cornwell joined Ned Graham and his parents in a November meeting to express their concerns that the couple should not be buried at the site of the Billy Graham Library, which is to open next year in Charlotte, North Carolina, and recently became a new option for the couple’s burial site.

The newspaper said Ruth Graham, 86, wishes to be buried, as long planned, at The Cove, a conference center of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association located in Asheville, North Carolina.

The evangelism pioneer said he and his wife of 63 years will eventually be “together in heaven,” but were still considering the appropriate burial spot. “That determination will not be made by our family, our organization or outsiders, but will be ours alone,” he said.

Billy Graham’s spokesperson, A. Larry Ross, likewise said the burial issue is a “personal family matter” that has not yet been concluded. “That’s a decision that’s between Mr. and Mrs. Graham and is still being discussed,” he said.

Franklin Graham’s spokesperson, Mark DeMoss, said Billy Graham, 88, didn’t know that a *Washington Post* reporter was present during the discussion. Ross said the

staff of the association also was unaware of the journalist's plans to be there.

DeMoss confirmed that the brothers—two of the Grahams' five children—are not on the same side on the issue of where the burial plots should be. "Franklin and his brother don't agree, and they also don't agree about the appropriate forum for this discussion," DeMoss said, referring to the suddenly public nature of the family's dispute.

Cornwell, known for her crime novels, was quoted by the *Post* as saying that the library's inclusion of a robotic cow discussing Graham's early life on a North Carolina farm is "tacky." DeMoss said the cow was included to help the library appeal to children.

Franklin Graham defended the general plans for the library, which is to be built "as a means of continuing Billy Graham's 60-year ministry of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ." He said his father has supported the library because it is not "intended to be a museum or a shrine to any man."

According to DeMoss, the library, which will exceed 40,000 square feet, will eventually house Billy Graham's personal papers, and most of the funds have been raised for the \$27 million building. It will be on the same 63-acre campus as the new headquarters of the Graham association, which opened in 2005 after a move from Minneapolis.

Ross said both Grahams have received "fairly good reports from their doctors" at recent appointments. Ruth Graham is mostly homebound, and her husband "has a lot of the aches and pains of a now 88-year-old person." On December 18 Billy Graham was at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, to receive treatment for macular degeneration. *-Religion News Service*