

## Ruth Graham & Friends Provide All The Heat People Need For A Wintry Weekend In Minnesota

Neither snow nor...well, let's stick to snow this time. A mid-winter snowstorm, timed to take place just as the evening rush hour was peaking, failed to keep hundreds of people from turning out for the Friday night kickoff of the Ruth Graham & Friends Twin Cities "Get Growing" conference.

An even heavier snowfall overnight didn't deter hundreds more people from attending the Saturday conference, which drew people in from as far away as Duluth, Minn. (125 miles away), southern Minnesota and Wisconsin.

There was no denying that the weather might have kept some folks at home, but the overall effect of the new free ticket policy was very evident. Attendance soared for this, the second Twin Cities Ruth Graham & Friends conference, with more than 800 people in attendance – more than double the numbers of the first conference.

Some people came just for specific sessions, or to hear Ruth's Friday night testimony, although the general attendance seemed to be fairly level throughout the conference. Holding the conference at North Heights Lutheran Church in Arden Hills, also home to the first Twin Cities conference, proved to be a real boon not only because the church is so well set-up to handle large events such as the Get Growing conference (including a world-class dining facility).

Since North Heights is so active in the community at large, hosting a large number of public events throughout the year, many people reported that they learned about the conference by checking in on the North Heights web site – or by reading their copy of the North Heights newsletter received through the mail – just to see what activities were coming up at the church.

An informal survey of attendees revealed that a majority were non-members of North Heights, which was a strong indication that the word had gotten well beyond the boundaries of the church.

### **A Holy Arena, Overflowing With Good Will And Good Information**

"I am honored to sit among this company, where I know Christ will be present," said the Reverend Mindy Bak on Friday night in introducing the conference participants. Rev. Bak headed up the organizing effort for the conference for North Heights Lutheran Church.

Ruth's use of the Prodigal Son story in her Friday night testimony really resonated with people, as usual. "The Prodigal Son story, that really grabbed my heart," said Pauline, an attendee who also serves as a volunteer with a local Breaking Free agency.

"Ruth's message is very good. It reminds us of how much God loves us, no matter how bad our lives are," said another male attendee, who requested anonymity.

More than anything, though, it was the inspiration that people felt from hearing Ruth Graham speaking in such clear, honest words that people said really set the overall tone of the conference.

"The power of being transparent and broken, because that's what God uses, that was very powerful," said Carol and Celeste, two attendees.

"Ruth's talk was very down to earth and personable," said Bev and Sally, two more attendees. "She exposed quite a bit of herself, and it makes you feel more comfortable to know that even though she's Billy Graham's daughter, she is a human being too with the same problems that we all have."

Another attendee noted how hearing Ruth's testimony directly impacted her own life: "I learned something new, that my brokenness is seen as a sweet fragrance to God," she said. "I never thought of that before, never realized that God can create out of chaos. Because I've felt like my life is worthless, but now I know that God works in ruins. Even though my life is in ruins, He can take the broken pieces of my life and maybe make something out of them."

### **A Hurting World, And What To Do About It**

So many people said they came to the conference not just to help themselves, but to learn new ways to help others who were hurting – and that they care about as well.

"The church in general should really be doing a lot more of this – this is reality," said Linda, an attendee there for both herself and to help others. "I will be able to use a lot of this in my own ministry," she said, while also noting that there was much she learned that would be useful in helping her deal with a daughter who was struggling with chemical addiction issues. "I'm having trouble with my daughter," she said. "This will help me parent her in a way that I want to parent, not like I'm doing now where I kind of want to take the Bible and shove it down her throat. That's not working."

“I’m going to use a lot of the wisdom I’ve learned here, and I know a lot of other parents dealing with what I am dealing with, so I am going to go back and maybe share my experiences with them too,” she added.

She appreciated the broad perspective on issues provided by the conference, even though her primary focus for herself was on obtaining information to help with the parenting process. “This is a broader spectrum that is covered at this conference,” she said, “and that’s good. If there was more emphasis just on parenting, for example, you might get more parents with little kids. That has its challenges too, but sometimes it’s the ones with the older kids with the bigger problems that most need help, and that can be addressed through this bigger perspective.”

“We are a hurting society,” and churches must do a better job of acknowledging that if they are to stay relevant in today’s world, said Dr. Jimmie Ray Lee in his plenary session on “Lessons Learned.” The problems people have are real, and they will accept help where they can get it, he said. Churches that reach out to the hurting through a truly compassionate ministry, such as exemplified by the Get Growing conferences, are the ones most needed today, he said.

“These are things that are not always discussed at church,” said conference-goers Dawn and Christie, “and that’s a really good thing that Ruth Graham & Friends are discussing them. The churches really need to do more of this – there is something in these conferences for everybody here.”

It all went back to Ruth’s testimony, said Ken, a conference-goer. “Her being so open and sharing the really hard parts of her life, that was just a blessing. Most of the time people cover that up and pretend they’ve got to be perfect. I really appreciated this openness.”

### **New Workshop On Relationships Hits The Mark**

Dr. Linda Mintle’s new workshop on Truths to Strengthening Your Relationships, which debuted at the Minnesota conference, was a hit with conference attendees. It seemed to be one of the most couple-friendly seminars at the conference.

“With God,” Linda informed her audience, “you can change. Your past does not determine your future.” That message is much more powerful than what people encounter in secular psychology, she noted, where it’s taken for granted that the past does determine a person’s future.

“Take your difficult relationships and work on them, and your other relationships will become better too,” she advised.

“I thought the family relationship seminar was very informative,” said Craig, an attendee. “My wife and I enjoyed it very much.”

People who attended Dr. Linda’s relationship workshop came away impressed with the fact that she provided specific Biblical references – serving as guidelines – for developing a better understanding of the basics of building healthy relationships. This approach – which is common to all of the Get Growing workshops – provided people with a very well-thought-out framework for dealing with relationship issues on an ongoing basis in their own lives. In other words, people could take this information and apply it immediately to their own situations – a real benefit that makes the Get Growing conferences stand out as uniquely powerful events.

“We attended both of Dr. Linda’s workshops,” said Diana and Rose, two conference goers, “they were very helpful. She made references to Biblical passages that were very meaningful.”

All of the workshop leaders reported that people were very involved in what they were discussing. Attendees used every second of the expanded question and answer periods, now a part of each workshop, to their advantage by peppering their workshop speaker with thoughtful and often poignant questions.

“This day has just surpassed my expectations,” said one conference goer at the end of the Saturday sessions. “It’s been a wonderful day. It’s just where I am in my life now, just what I need to find.”

Maybe the most resounding commentary of all came from Karen, a seasoned conference-goer (she was also at the first Twin Cities Get Growing conference): “Oh my, how God proves his faithfulness and his goodness over and over again! This was my second Ruth Graham & Friends Conference and if possible, it was more powerful than before! It was a gift to hear from your new friends as well as those who spoke before. Your message and format are so perfect for me and the boldness, directness of delivering God’s word is truly my kind of learning style.

“Thank you for your kind heart and your ministry. You have touched me—I have grown in Christ!! Praise God.”

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