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P.O. Box 1676

Frisco, Texas 75034

Phone: 972.335.1181

Toll Free: 877.781.7067

Fax: 214.722.2313

E-mail: info@friscostyle.com

Web: www.friscostyle.com

Ad Sales: (972) 335-1306

THEY'RE DYNAMIC! They're funny! They're entertaining! They're spiritual! They're real! They are the Women of Faith and six of the presenting ladies live right here in Frisco. The Women of Faith organization is the largest non-denominational Christian women's conference in the nation with over 400,000 women in attendance this year.

Author, motivational speaker and entrepreneur, Steve Arterburn, founded the organization, now in its 12th conference year. In 1996, the group of speakers sold out to crowds in ten churches. Presently, the group sells out in major arenas and travels to nearly 30 different cities. This past summer, the conference sold out in Dallas at the American Airlines Center and Reunion Arena. So, for the first time ever, they shuttled the speakers from one venue to the other.

The conference is unique in that it speaks to women of all backgrounds. Whether you think you want to be a Christian, you've just become a Christian or you've been a Christian all of your life, there is something for everyone at every spiritual level. The presenters take everyday Christian values and incorporate them into their presentations with the hope of uplifting women. The *Chicago Sun-Times* referred to the conference as a "Spiritual Spa."

The speakers, like every one of us, have a story. Some of their stories are heart wrenching and some are comical. While their stories are all personal and

unique, their message is the same. God loves each one of us no matter who we are or what we're going through.

The Women of Faith ladies are co-workers, friends and even consider each other family. That family extended to the location of their homes with many of them choosing the Dallas-Ft. Worth

in theology. "Then Steve Arterburn approached me saying he was 'putting a thing together that has four speakers' and asked if I would be interested." Ms. Walsh admits that she wasn't interested—at first. "I originally declined because I was turning 40 and pregnant and the timing just didn't seem right." Mr.

Arterburn persisted, asking if she would at least meet a few of the ladies who were going to be involved. "I met with Luci Swindoll and Marilyn Meberg for coffee and Barbara Johnson joined us by phone." After meeting with these women, Ms. Walsh had a change of heart. "I was blown away with the way they expressed their faith. The idea was very different than I thought it would be." She thought the conference structure was going to be a series of steps to improve relationships. "I thought it would just give women one more thing to do. Instead, the idea was that wherever they are in life, they are loved by God just as they are."

So, with 6-week-old baby Christian in tow, Ms. Walsh made her first conference in Hawaii. "I'm pretty sure that we had the entire contents of his nursery with us too." Christian continued to travel with his mommy and the group until he was eight years old. These days he's doing what most 10-year-old boys are doing, football and soccer. Although he isn't traveling with them anymore, he's still part of the family. "Having the input of these ladies for Christian is like having an extended family," said Ms. Walsh.

After 12 years with the organization, she remains passionate about the project



Clockwise from top left: Patsy Clairmont, Luci Swindoll, Nicole Johnson & Marilyn Meberg
photos provided by Women of Faith

Women of Faith in Frisco

By Wendy Crooks

area in general and Frisco specifically.

SHEILA WALSH

Born and raised in western Scotland, Sheila Walsh made her first trip to the United States at age 26. At age 29, she made the move across the pond. She and her husband, Barry, have been married 12 years and have one son, Christian, who is in the fifth grade.

Prior to becoming part of the Women of Faith organization, Ms. Walsh co-hosted the *700 Club* with Pat Robertson, which aired on the Christian network. She also completed her master's degree

and its future. "I'm very committed to what God is doing here. My hope is that we could bring the conference to everyone in the world."

MARY GRAHAM

The organization definitely wouldn't run as smoothly without its president, Mary Graham. Ms. Graham grew up in Oklahoma and moved to California where she earned a B.A. in sociology and became long-time friends with Luci Swindoll and Marilyn Meberg.

In 1996 Ms. Graham worked as a consultant for the group and in 1999 joined the organization full-time and moved to Frisco. "I had experience with live events and they needed help."

Not only is Ms. Graham president of the Women of Faith organization, she also serves as emcee at the conferences. In the office she is responsible for 90-plus employees as well as working closely with the speakers and musical guests during the weekend conferences. She also oversees all of the Women of Faith recording and publishing contracts and helps get new projects started such as the new teen program, The Revolve Tour.

Being close to the action, Ms. Graham is confident about why women come and why they come back. Fifty percent of the women who attend the conferences are repeat attendees. Ninety five percent of the women who have attended say they would like to come back but perhaps their schedules don't allow them to. Ms. Graham explains, "Women have an enormous amount of responsibility for home, family, schools, community and church. They have overactive responsibility glands and there's not a lot out there to refresh us." She adds, "It is good to be reminded that you're not alone. To hear women that are very real who have suffered and recovered can be a life-changing experience."

Family also came up when Ms. Graham discussed the group. "I have never been in a group like this before. There is a huge sense of camaraderie. We are there in the good times and the bad and we genuinely care about each other. We are a Christian family."

LUCI SWINDOLL

Born in El Campo, Texas, Luci Swindoll is

another dynamic part of the Women of Faith speaker team. Ms. Swindoll certainly didn't take the most conventional route to a career as a Christian conference speaker. She started off in the oil business with a degree in commercial art. She worked as a draftsman artist and worked her way up to an executive position with the oil company in what was generally thought of as a "man's" field of work.

After her long and impressive career in the oil business, Ms. Swindoll began to work for her brother and his wife, Chuck and Cynthia Swindoll, as vice president in charge of public relations for his Bible teaching ministry, Insight for Living. She did this for seven years while continuing to travel, speak and write on Christian-based issues. She also sang for 15 years with the Dallas Opera.

Although she never married, Ms. Swindoll loves being a single woman. Her father gave her some very important advice. He told her, "Line your will with God's will." It seems that she has done just that. She joined Women of Faith at its inception and obviously has no regrets. "I love being a part of a team that makes an eternal difference. The girls are also the sisters I never had."

At age 75, she is the oldest member of the team and hopes to retire at some point.

PATSY CLAIRMONT

Ms. Clairmont is no stranger to the stage. Prior to joining Women of Faith she traveled and trained people in communications. She was a speaker with another Christian speaker, Florence Littauer. Ms. Clairmont is, however, very excited about the big stage that she performs on now. "The ham part of me was looking for a round stage. It gives room for more creative expression!"

There's no doubt that Ms. Clairmont is thrilled with her affiliation with the women in the group. "We're vested in each others' lives. They are cheerleaders. They affirm you. They make you look forward to being in their company."

Besides being such a key speaker for the Women of Faith conferences, Ms. Clairmont also served last year as the speaking coach to the young teenagers that are working on the Revolve Tour. "This has been a joyful experience and I would love to continue my ongoing



Next Month in Frisco STYLE

JANUARY is the traditional 'get in shape' month. We all have great intentions for our New Year's resolutions to start that new exercise program. Well, remember when the trendy new ways to get in shape were classes like yoga, Pilates and Tiiji? What is the latest trend in extreme fitness? We'll bring you some of the newest and hottest ways to keep that resolution and stay fit. The January *Frisco STYLE Magazine* may be a life changing issue for you.



A Women of Faith conference presentation

ministry of working with the younger speakers.”

Ms. Clairmont has been married for 45 years, has two grown sons and two grandsons. Someone once asked her husband what the key to their long marriage was and he replied, “She travels.”

MARILYN MEBERG

Another great asset to the group is Marilyn Meberg. One of the original four speakers of Women of Faith, Ms. Meberg has a plethora of heart wrenching experiences to share with conference goers. From her husband of 30 years dying suddenly of pancreatic cancer to losing her little baby girl from complications of Spina Bifida, Ms. Meberg can make you cry. The good news is that she can make you laugh too. How? Her story is that of hope. “Knowing that God is alive and

well and He chooses to live in our lives if we choose is one of the messages that we want to share.”

Ms. Meberg’s children are proud of her involvement with the organization but most importantly she likes what her involvement means. “It’s good to know that it is possible to commit your life to something meaningful.” At 68-years-old, she sees the dangling retirement carrot. “Maybe in two years I might want to make room for younger women to come in.”

NICOLE JOHNSON

Mary Graham discovered Nicole Johnson while she was doing live theater and quickly tried to recruit her. “She asked me to come for one weekend and I have been with them for seven years now.”

Ms. Johnson also attributes the success of Women of Faith to the way they are presenting their message. “A lot of

women don’t want to go to conferences because they fear they might be told that they’re doing something wrong. At Women of Faith, we assure them that they’re already doing great and that they should keep going!”

Ms. Johnson quickly realized what the others already knew. “I found myself flying twice as far as everyone else so I moved to Frisco too.” It seems that it was the right decision for her. “My community and my friendships over the last seven years have been life shaping. I would love to stay involved with this amazing group for a long time.”

WORLD VISION

Besides their friendships and families, the Women of Faith ladies all share interest in one of the same charities. The Women of Faith organization partners with World Vision, a charitable organization



photo provided by Women of Faith

that helps the very poor children of the world. The organization is the same one that has the commercials toting “your donation of just \$1 a day will make a difference in the life of a child and his entire community.” The group aids the terribly poor children in Honduras, Africa, Sri Lanka, Bolivia, Bangladesh and more. Each of the ladies sponsors many children on their own. In January the group will once again travel together to do “hands on” work in Zambia, Africa.

Next year’s conference theme is “Infinite Grace” and they’ll be back in Dallas in August 2008. We’re so blessed to have this amazing group of women right here in our community. For more information and conference dates, visit www.womenoffaith.com.

Wendy Crooks is a freelance writer living in Plano.