

## **2015 WTW Conference Speakers - Bios and Get-to-Know-You Questions**

### MARY JO SHARP

Mary Jo Sharp is a former atheist from the Pacific Northwest who thought religion was for the weak-minded. She holds a Masters in Christian Apologetics and is the first woman to become a Certified Apologetics Instructor through the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Mary Jo is an Assistant Professor of apologetics at Houston Baptist University, on faculty with Summit Ministries, an author with Kregel Publications and B&H Publications, and has recently produced two apologetics Bible studies with LifeWay Christian Resources. She is the founder and director of Confident Christianity, and has engaged in two formal, public debates with Muslims. Mary Jo is also the wife of an awesome husband and the mom of a truly wonderful daughter!

1. Why do you think women should come to this conference / how will it help women in the church?

It has become increasingly necessary for Christians in our society to be able to aptly and thoughtfully give a defense of the reason of the hope of Jesus Christ. We see more aggressive verbal, as well as even heightened legal, discrimination against followers of Jesus than our country has seen in a long time. A woman can lose confidence in her ability to converse about her belief in God from all the confused messages. My hope for women attending the conference is that they come away emboldened and encouraged in their faith and in their ability to aptly communicate why they believe in Jesus Christ as the Savior of mankind.

2. Tell me something about yourself that people may not generally know.

I am a former public school band director and I still play the saxophone. When I was younger, I had plans to replace the famous movie music composer, John Williams, as the Boston Pops Symphony Orchestra conductor. Obviously, my life has taken a different course!

3. What is one particular challenge that women face today?

I mentioned previously that women received many mixed messages in our culture today. One particularly confusing message centers on what it means to be a woman. Christian women should find their identity in the person and teaching of Jesus Christ. It is of utmost importance that Christian women can aptly communicate what it means to be a Christian, first and foremost. The other challenge that women face today is the amount of irrational argumentation and propagandist techniques used to manipulate people in our culture to get them to buy things, vote for a certain candidate, back a specific cause, agree with certain philosophies, and more. Women need to gain skill with some basic logic to aptly communicate the truth in a confused culture.

4. How did you come to have a passion for apologetics?

When I was a younger Christian, I began to doubt the existence of God based in how I saw believers treat one another. I figured that though these believers professed that God's Word was

true, they did not believe it to be true. Then I began to question my reasoning for believing it was true. I found I wasn't sure how to answer questions such as, "Did Jesus rise from the dead?" or "Does God exist?" or "Can I trust the Bible?" or "Why do I say God is good when there is so much evil in the world?" I decided to search for answers to these questions, which led me into the field of apologetics! I realized that if I had doubts about God, then other people in the church must also struggle with doubts. So I began to teach apologetics in my local church.

## DIANNA NEWMAN

Dianna Newman holds an Hon. B.Sc. with a double major in Psychology and Sociology from the University of Toronto, and an M.A. from Southern Evangelical Seminary, in Apologetics and Philosophy. Dianna's passion is to help equip college and university students defend their faith while on the secular campus or in the marketplace; as a member of TEAM, she travels both nationally and internationally to speak at universities, churches, women's conferences, and community events. Dianna is a member of the speaking team for the International Society of Women in Apologetics (ISWA). You can follow Dianna on twitter: @DNewma and visit her blog at [www.diannanewman.org](http://www.diannanewman.org).

1. Why do you think women should come to this conference / how will it help women in the church?

Women should come to this conference because it's an encouragement in itself to see other women defend their faith! In addition, the conference will equip women to think about and answer the questions that the culture is requiring us to answer.

2. Tell me something about yourself that people may not generally know.

I am, by nature, a quiet person. It doesn't come across when I'm speaking or teaching, but I am definitely not an enemy of just being quiet.

3. What is one particular challenge that women face today?

One of the challenges that women face is sheer confusion about what it means to be a woman. For a very long time, women have adopted the cultural idea that our womanhood is a matter of looks, a matter of mannerisms, a matter of vocation, or even a set of behaviors. But is that really what it means to be a woman? Because if this is what it means to be a woman, then anyone can alter their look, mannerisms, vocation, or behavior and thereby claim "I am a woman." Recent headlines have made it very clear that this is exactly what's happening.

Biblically speaking, being a woman is more special and unique than current culture gives credit for. And as woman apologists, we have to be able to rise to the occasion and be very clear about this. Because, ultimately, this confusion will affect us all in ways we can't even begin to fathom.

4. How did you come to have a passion for apologetics?

In the culture, there are bad ideas about what it means to be human, about what it means to be a man, about what it means to be a woman, and about God. The list could go on! At its core, Christianity responds to very bad ideas by inserting truths where there are lies and bringing clarity where there is real confusion. This led me to become passionate about being able to defend, present and articulate.

## CYNTHIA SUFFERN

Cynthia Suffern holds a B.A. from the UNC Chapel Hill, a certificate in teaching English as a Second Language from Duke University, and an M.A. in Apologetics from Southern Evangelical Seminary. Cynthia teaches English to speakers of other languages and she enjoys assisting international ministries. She has a passion to encourage others, especially women and youth, to love God with their minds and think clearly about the uniqueness of Christianity and the nature of God. Cynthia is a member of the International Society of Women in Apologetics and speaks on a variety of topics in churches and conferences.

1. Why do think women should come to this conference / how will it help women in the church?

Today in America women can have many roles, such as being a career woman and breadwinner, daughter, wife, mother, caretaker, as well, as leaders in church ministries. And in these roles we often have a heart to heart connection with others, such as when sitting around the kitchen table and discussing what really matters in life. But in the midst of juggling all these demands on our time, women often discount the importance of having their minds trained by Christ and His word, and learning how to think clearly about other truth claims challenging Christianity. But it's when we sit around the kitchen table discussing the news of the day or the latest movie, that we need to understand how to think like Christ and communicate His love, truth, and grace. This conference will strengthen every woman's faith and confidence in the truthfulness of Christianity and in the reliability of the Bible and Christ's redemptive work for us.

2. Tell me something about yourself that people may not generally know.

I'm a fan of Julia Child, and I love to cook French food, especially after living in France about seven years with my husband and children.

3. What is one particular challenge that women face today?

Time for God and His Word and learning about His perspective on reality is at a premium. There are always expectations on women to handle well the pressures of dating, marriage, child-rearing, working, volunteering with school and church ministries, and caring for older parents. Today the pressures and expectations on women, even from themselves, can be even greater. Add to this, the frenzied pace of life and demanding lure of technology at our fingertips leaves precious little time for reflection, study in the Word, and time with God. And with a mind running on empty spiritually it's even harder to understand and combat the onslaught of the secular mindset and media, especially the current confusion about womanhood and gender.

4. How did you come to have a passion for apologetics?

I had loved the writings of CS Lewis and Francis Schaffer for many years. But Christian apologetics and worldview studies came on my "radar screen" when I was teaching my three sons in the 1990s. Finding a wealth of other Christian writers, theologians, and apologists who have ably contended for the faith for 2000 years deepened my faith and strengthened my assurance that Christianity is the most coherent and livable worldview. I love studying the Bible, theology, and how to think well about competing worldviews such as secularism and Islam, especially through a female perspective.

## NEL BRACE

Nel Brace holds a B.A. and Diploma of Higher Education from the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa, and an M.A. degree in Philosophy with a major in Philosophy and Biblical Studies from Southern Evangelical Seminary. Nel's interest in apologetics and the Christian mind was prompted by her interaction with Muslims and those of other world views at Speaker's Corner in London. Here she became aware of her personal lack of training in Christian thinking and the need for such training in the church at large.

1. Why do you think women should come to this conference / how will it help women in the church?

I will be giving several reasons for the importance of apologetics to women specifically in my opening session. Suffice it to say that apologetics should be part and parcel of one's life as a Christian, whether you are male or female. Defending the historic Christian faith, and being able to give a reason for the hope within you, should be part of your Christian walk in the same way as prayer, Bible study, and having fellowship with believers is. It is a biblical command that we ignore at our peril.

2. Tell me something about yourself that people may not generally know.

I was born and raised in South Africa. I am the mother of four children.

3. What is one particular challenge that women face today?

The many demands on our time and being able to choose our priorities in order to spend what time we have wisely.

4. How did you come to have a passion for apologetics?

I had a sincere desire to share my faith with Muslims but found that they had many questions about and objections to Christianity that I had never even considered. God sent people across my path who had answers and who were true apologists for the faith. In learning from them, I grew in my faith and became a more efficient witness. The world of the Christian intellect had been opened up to me and there was no turning back!

## MARCIA MONTENEGRO

Prior to trusting Christ, Marcia was involved for many years in Eastern and New Age beliefs, and was a licensed professional astrologer for 8 yrs. During that time, she taught astrology, and served as President of the Metropolitan Atlanta Astrological Society as well as Chairperson of the Atlanta Board of Astrology Examiners. Marcia has a Masters in Religion from Southern Evangelical Seminary, Charlotte, NC, and is a missionary with Fellowship International Mission. Through her ministry, Christian Answers for the New Age, she has spoken in 30 states, is a frequent guest on radio, and has published articles in several Christian publications. Marcia is the mother of an adult son, and is the author of *SpellBound: The Paranormal Seduction of Today's Kids* (Cook, 2006).

1. Why do you think women should come to this conference / how will it help women in the church?

Many women want to study or learn more about theology and defending the faith, but this is not always encouraged in churches. This is a chance for them to get exposed to, equipped in, and excited about these areas. Women can see if they would like to pursue it. You never know where the Lord may take you from here!

2. Tell me something about yourself that people may not generally know.

My first words were in German and my first school was a French school.

3. What is one particular challenge that women face today?

To have confidence that they can reason from Scripture and respond to objections to the faith.

4. How did you come to have a passion for apologetics?

As a new believer, I was introduced to apologists to the cults who were shedding the light of Scripture on false teachings. I ended up speaking on the New Age at several counter-cult and discernment conferences. When I was exploring going to seminary, I discovered that Southern Evangelical Seminary was offering degrees with an emphasis on apologetics. At the time (around '96), I knew of no other seminary with this focus and knew I could use this training in my ministry (part-time then but became full-time in 1998). As time passes, I see the need for apologetics in the church more and more to equip believers to address and answer objections in an increasingly post-Christian secular culture.

## JULIE MILLER

Julie Miller serves on the board of directors for Ratio Christi as well as chapter director and chaplain of Ratio Christi at Rutgers University. She earned a Master of Arts in Christian Apologetics from Biola University and holds a Bachelor's degree in Accounting and Finance from Texas A&M University. She has a certification from the Cross Examined Instructors Academy and attended the Discovery Institute CS Lewis Fellows Program on Science and Society. She is currently pursuing her Doctor of Philosophy in Humanities at Faulkner University's Great Books Honors College. Julie is interested in equipping Christians and

engaging skeptics with the best answers to the objections to Christianity. Julie lives in New Jersey with Buzz, her husband of 30 years. They have two sons, Cameron and Noah.

1. Why do you think women should come to this conference / how will it help women in the church?

This conference is for women who want to be 21st century disciples of Jesus, which means knowing why you believe Christianity is true and then being able to confidently defend your faith in a winsome way. All of us want to get better at commending Christianity to those in our sphere of influence and this conference will help us with tools, encouragement, resources and a new perspective to do just that.

2. Tell me something about yourself that people may not generally know.

I hold the New Jersey state record for powerlifting in the Women's Master Class age 45-49. Squat/Bench/Deadlift Total of 501 lbs. Don't ask me to do it again.

3. What is one particular challenge that women face today?

Not only do we live in a post-Christian culture, but we also live in a religiously pluralistic culture. This means that most people see religious truth claims as merely opinion. The Christian truth claim that Jesus is the only way to God seems absurd and offensive. What is the best way to commend Christianity in our pluralistic culture? Is there a way to adjudicate between religions? How can we have engaging conversations that will cause our friends to want to investigate the Truth of the matter? We will devote two conference sessions on this particular challenge, so come get equipped!

4. How did you come to have a passion for apologetics?

Like many others, my interest in apologetics was fueled by two things. First, I personally had questions about Christianity, like: Do the gospel accounts give a reliable record of Jesus? How can Jesus be the only way to God amidst so much religious diversity? What about the fate of the unevangelized? These are the kinds of questions I began to investigate. Second, my evangelistic efforts were unfruitful, largely due to my inability to give reasons and evidence for the truth claims I was commending. Even though I knew what I believed and was convinced by the Holy Spirit that the gospel was true, I was unable to show others good reasons and evidence to follow Christ. In the current culture, I realized that sharing the gospel must go hand in hand with defending it. After all, this is the method the apostle Paul used in his ministry; he was an evangelist and an apologist.

## NORA HALE

Nora Hale holds a B.A. in Studio Art from the University of North Carolina- Chapel Hill and an M.A. in Religion from Southern Evangelical Seminary. Upon graduating, Nora was named Dean of Women at Southern Evangelical Seminary, where she leads instruction in the Women's Ministry Certificate Program. Nora designed the program with a passion to help women understand their biblical role in the family and local church ministry. Nora has spoken on

multiple occasions at the National Conference on Christian Apologetics, as well as at national and international women's events.

1. Why do you think women should come to this conference / how will it help women in the church?

Because women are by nature relational, an apologetics conference for women just makes sense. We enjoy learning new ways, better ways to communicate with others the truths of our faith that have everyday practicality built into the most important questions/answers of life. A women's conference gives us the opportunity to settle areas of doubt/confusion and unashamedly to address the dilemmas our culture has no clue how to face. Talking about our sincere concerns in a safe place, where no question is out of bounds, just frees us as believers not to "play at" Christianity, but with confidence to help those who want to understand how the truth that Christianity espouses is the Good News for this time in history.

2. Tell me something about yourself that people may not generally know.

In 1969, no fault divorce came into existence in the US. My family was one of the first in our small town to experience the "joys" of a fatherless home life. Although I am so thankful for my parents and grandparents, I personally have experienced what many, if not the majority of our culture, experience on a regular basis. The subjects that concern me most within Christianity have to do with our responsibility to teach and live what our Scriptures hold. To defend family and church in a fallen world motivates my taking the challenge to speak on difficult topics that must be addressed.

3. What is one particular challenge that women face today?

Today women face an onslaught of feminist propaganda that threatens to devalue the core of femininity as well as to undermine the teachings of the Bible. Not only are the teachings of Paul misrepresented, but also the very words Jesus Christ spoke while here on Earth are denied.

4. How did you come to have a passion for apologetics?

While attending the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the 70's, I began to increasingly question my belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. I believed there was a God, but really struggled with doubts implanted by the humanistic ideology of the culture, especially university professors. My first philosophy class pushed me into a sincere search for truth, wherever that might lead. I picked up a copy of Mere Christianity, purely by "accident" and from then on I have been hooked on having a reasonable defense for my faith in Christ.

### JILL GRAHAM

Jill Graham is a graduate of UNC Chapel Hill and Southern Evangelical Seminary where she earned a Masters degree in Religion. After teaching high school English and theater for nine years, she was promoted to being a full-time mom of two beautiful children, Wesley and Julie. She is happily married to Matt, also a graduate of Southern Evangelical Seminary. Jill enjoys using her teaching gift to help others see God's truth and apply it to the tough questions of life. She and her family (and three cats) reside in Waxhaw, NC.

1. Why do you think women should come to this conference / how will it help women in the church?

I think women will benefit from the conference by being able to seek out answers to tough questions of faith they or those they love may have. We are key in teaching the next generation about God, so we need to be ready!

2. Tell me something about yourself that people may not generally know.

I'm a theater teacher with a flair for the theatrical. I'm also an avid Lord of the Rings and CS Lewis fan.

3. What is one particular challenge that women face today?

Women face the challenge of helping the next generation and our own face a world that is increasingly hostile to our faith. We have to think deeply about our faith and not just rely on feelings to stay strong under the pressure.

4. How did you come to have a passion for apologetics?

Apologetics has helped me as I've always been a thinker and I've had some difficult personal issues that have pushed me to seek beyond the easy pat answers. Apologetics has helped me deal with personal doubt and grow closer to God. It's hard to have a relationship with God if you don't think he's really there and is good!

### CHARMAIN BARNES

Charmain Barnes holds a B.A. in Bible from Moody Bible Institute, an M.A. in Apologetics from Southern Evangelical Seminary and a Master of Accountancy degree from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. She served as a short-term missionary with the Navigators mission agency in Stavropol, Russia. Charmain has led various Bible studies and taught at women's retreats. She currently works as an accountant with Duke Energy in Charlotte, NC.

1. Why do you think women should come to this conference/ how will it help women in the church?

The study of apologetics is NOT about becoming a great debater. You do NOT have to enjoy argumentation in order to attend the conference. I have found that apologetics has solidified my faith and enhanced my understanding of the unique nature of Christianity. A small investment of your time will aid you in discerning truth from error and better equip you to present the gospel in our pluralistic culture. I view apologetics as a means to not only confidently defend my faith, but to help remove the mental roadblocks others may face in accepting Christ as their Savior.

2. Tell me something about yourself that people may not generally know.

I love the outdoors and hiking is a favorite activity of mine (when I can find the time). I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to hike Matanuska Glacier in Alaska.

### 3. What is one particular challenge that women face today?

A challenge that women face today is to cultivate and maintain a "pure heart." A pure heart encompasses not only the physical aspect of purity, but also the spiritual aspect of purity which involves desires and motivations. Our secular culture promotes social norms that are increasing in direct contrast to Christian values. At every turn in society, believers are confronted with the temptation to compromise their beliefs in order to achieve what the world says will bring them happiness. In the Scriptures, we are commanded to not be conformed to the pattern of the world, but to rather be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:1-2). Pursuing truth through Biblical study and prayer, in conjunction with the work of the Holy Spirit, develops the inward purity of the heart and thus produces thoughts and actions that are honoring to God.

### 4. How did you come to have a passion for apologetics?

As a young woman, I became weary of hearing people say that I adhered to Christianity simply because I was an American, a Southerner, or a follower of family tradition. I pursued the study of apologetics to learn more about my faith in order to present the gospel clearly. I have worked in the corporate world for over 20 years and in that time I have encountered persons of many different faiths. Apologetic knowledge has enabled me to lovingly present the absolute truth of Christianity in contrast to other world religions. Some of my co-workers have not necessarily responded positively, but in every instance they usually acknowledge that I have thoughtful reasons for my belief. I find it exciting to know why I believe what I believe and it creates within me a desire to engage others in a conversation about Christ.

### KATHRYN CAMP

Kathryn is a licensed minister and a national conference speaker. She is a graduate with cum laude honors from Virginia Commonwealth University with a BS in the field of economics. She holds a Master of Divinity degree from Baptist Theological Seminary, and is currently a doctorate of ministry candidate in apologetics at Southern Evangelical Seminary. She is a member of the International Society of Christian Apologetics (ISCA) as well as the International Society of Women in Apologetics (ISWA).

Kathryn is the director and founder of Living Into The Truth Ministries LLC, an apologetic ministry based on the promises of Jesus that if we abide by his Word he will live in us just as he lives in the Father (John 14:15-20). Her ministry offers young adults and their parents a realistic look at how the Westernized culture has managed to create a mirage and a distortion of what it looks like to be a Christian; <http://www.livingintothetruth.org>.

### 1. Why do you think women should come to this conference / how will it help women in the church?

Women are ready to take their faith to the next level. After years of being drawn to God by wonderful godly women such as Beth Moore and Kay Arthur Ash, the more spiritually mature woman is prepared to become a true and active disciple for Christ. The world is demanding reasons to believe in a God whom they cannot see with their senses. It's time for women to understand why they believe what they believe and in turn to teach the world around them the reasons why knowing God is the most important aspect in the life of every human alive. Women

seek strong women as role models and a woman who can lovingly stand toe to toe with the most hardened heart is a true inspiration.

2. Tell me something about yourself that people may not generally know.

I was a competitive national gymnast as a teenager. The rigor of hours in the gym and competition taught me life skills of persistence and how to focus on my goals. As a Christian woman in the 21st century, I find that it is necessary to keep my focus on God as I continue to share the Truth of his Word in a hostile culture, which requires great discipline to continually seek godly wisdom through the Word of God.

3. What is one particular challenge that women face today?

The biggest challenge that I see that we face as women today, is remaining relevant in a culture which scoffs at any sign of biblically based morals and ethical standards. Our families are continually bombarded with the deceptive messages which they receive incessantly on a daily basis. A woman who maintains moral standards that are counter-cultural will inevitably be seen as backwards and out of touch.

4. How did you come to have a passion for apologetics?

I was confronted with the fact that even children in "Christian" independent schools were being taught that what was good is evil and what was evil is good. I knew that I needed to enter ministry full-time to combat the lies being propagated to children and their families about who God is and who He is not. My mission is to help people understand what they believe in order that they discern not only the times in which we live, but to teach others to discern Truth from error.