

Pivot From the Past

Winston-Salem Church Supports Underserved Women With Education

THE CHURCH

Ardmore Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, North Carolina

THE CHALLENGE

Underprivileged women without children are often turned away from community services.

ONE BIG IDEA

Empower women with life skills, mentoring and Bible studies.

In 2015, the mission team at Ardmore Baptist Church, a predominantly white congregation in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, wanted to start a new ministry to help local underserved communities. They especially wanted to target an untapped demographic, and during their research, they found one: women without children.

With the help of community partners, in 2018 the church launched Pivot Ministry, which is modeled after a national program called Christian Job Corps. Carol Polk, a former corporate executive, is Pivot's executive director.

"Our mission is empowering low-income women for better life and work opportunities," she says. "We give them a hand up, not a handout, and help them find their God-given strengths."

During each 16-week semester, the participants are taught personal and job-readiness skills in financial management, conflict management, decision-making, job interviewing and more.

Pivot instructors, participants and volunteers come from government agencies,

nonprofits, local companies, colleges, churches and other community partners, Polk says. The classes are taught in a three-story building in the inner city across from a bus stop.

"That was essential," says Polk. "We wanted it to be easily accessible and in the community, with us going to them, not them having to come to us."

Besides classes, each Pivot student gets a volunteer mentor who offers guidance and accountability. Students also participate in a Bible study led by church volunteers.

Pivot's graduation rate is 75% with 27 people successfully completing the program so far, Polk says.

While the program is for women without children, it also engages mothers who have for various reasons lost custody of their children. For example, one graduate, who once served time in prison on a felony drug charge, completed the Pivot program, got a job, earned promotions and raises, and was able to regain custody of her child.

"She comes to every graduation that we have," Polk says. "And if her schedule allows, when we have an orientation party for our new class, she'll come and give her testimony."

—Gail Allyn Short
ArdmoreBaptist.org

