



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PIVOT MINISTRY

Carol Polk, Pivot Ministry executive director (center, in glasses), share a group hug with first-semester participants

PIVOT *Ministry*

Helping women improve their lives

BY LYDIAN BERNHARDT AVERITT

To “pivot” means to turn quickly on a point. Ardmore Baptist Church’s Pivot Ministry seeks to build the support and skills that low-income women need when they’re ready for their lives to make a turn.

“Pivot is where women change their lives,” says Carol Polk, executive director. “Our mission is to empower low-income women for better life and work opportunities. We do that through classes in life skills, job readiness and Bible study.”

More than 20,000 working-aged women in Forsyth County live in poverty, according to the Department of Social Services. As many as 5,000 of those women don’t have minor dependents at home,

which disqualifies them from many support programs and forms of assistance.

“Women without dependents get turned away from a lot of places,” Polk says. “In 2015, Ardmore wanted to reach outside the church’s walls and start a new program to help an underserved group. Based on their research, this program was born.”

There’s no one type of participant, says program coordinator Michelle Minnich: They are Black, white, young and old. The oldest graduate is 73; the youngest participant was 19.

Some grew up in poverty while others became impoverished due



After a 2019 Pivot class, participant Candace Mayo (left) hugs Cora Sue Jarvis, volunteer Instructor.

to circumstance. Some are without diplomas or GEDs; at least one has a master's degree.

What they have in common is the desire for a new way to live.

"We have 24 unique referral sources – other churches, nonprofits, people, government organizations – who tell us how motivated these women are for a change in their lives," Polk says.

Polk made a similar life change in 2015, when she pivoted from a job at a large Winston-Salem law firm to help run the ministry, taking a chance – and an 83 percent pay cut.

"It was a God thing," Polk says.

Twenty women have graduated from four intentionally-small classes, meeting all day one day a week for 16 weeks, creating trusted, small communities where they can be vulnerable and understand each other.

One participant was motivated to look for a better job after Pivot helped her realize her gifts and talents. Others start to save money, boost their credit, earn diplomas. They also learn to value themselves and improve relationships.

"One participant was able to restore two relationships in her life and just glowed about how wonderful she felt," Minnich says. "She told us, 'I have to adjust to my new personality. I'm walking around the house humming. I'm not even mad at nobody.'"

More than 200 volunteers – instructors, mentors, food providers, prayer partners, board and committee members – make the program go. Trained mentors stay close to the participants and keep in touch even after graduation.

The bond among mentors, participants, instructors, volunteers and staff is one of the program's key benefits.

"We maintain relationships with the graduates kind of naturally, because I can't imagine not knowing what's going on with the ladies we've spent 16 weeks with," Minnich says. "We bond like you wouldn't believe. Seeing them flourish to be all they were created to be is the best part."

For more information about Pivot Ministries, visit Pivotnow.org.



Pivot Ministry participants interact during a class activity.