

From Prisoner to Prison Ministry That Sets the Captives Free

Brenda Spahn was called into ministry when she was a child but ran from it. As she grew older, she knew she was supposed to work with women who had been in trouble, but she avoided this calling until her own brush with the law opened her eyes.

After God saved her from a prison sentence, Spahn began helping with a prison ministry. She quickly discovered going to prisons wasn't enough, though, as those serving time need the most help when they get out. So she took six women into her home.

Now, 14 years later, Miss Brenda—as she's affectionately called—runs the Lovelady Center, a 280,000-square-foot facility serving nearly 500 women and children in Birmingham, Ala.

“God has absolutely been remarkable in this ministry,” she says. “I wish I could take credit for it, but I can't. It's all Him.”

The center provides counseling, job and life skills training, parenting classes, child care, medical care and more. The women attend daily devotionals, where many encounter Jesus. “The women are happy,” Spahn says. “They've had hope where they never had hope before.”

The Lovelady Center is a nine- to 12-month program, not a shelter. Some women are referred by the judicial system and some are self-referred, but they all need help.

“We meet them wherever they are,” Spahn says. “They need someone to help them.”

Stephanie Smith certainly needed help. After stealing \$50,000 from Spahn when she worked as her assistant, Smith fled to Florida. When she got in trouble again, a judge referred her to Lovelady.

Spahn initially wanted nothing to do with the woman who stole from her, but God told her to forgive, and she let her in the program.

“That place completely changed my life,” Smith says. “I am so glad that [Spahn] found it in her heart to forgive me. I came there and found Jesus, and that’s the best thing that ever happened to me.”

Even on the hard days, Spahn knows she is doing what God called her to do.

“When you fall into the plan that God has for you,” she says, “there is such peace that even in the chaos, you wouldn’t be anywhere else.” —*Gina Meeks*