



New Creation Pastor Ed Stewart: “I Can’t Imagine Doing Anything Else.”

New Creation Baptist Church will officially open its doors on Sunday, January 7, 2024, after years of prayer and faithful church and association collaborations. Located in the former Woodfield Park Baptist Church facilities, New Creation is positioned to begin reaching the roughly 7,000 people living in approximately 2,800 neighboring households with a renewed sense of energy and calling. According to Pastor Ed Stewart, the core planting team of 13 is excited and ready to begin.

“I have a calm assurance this is what God wants,” Stewart says of the launch before admitting he’s entering uncharted territory. “I have assurance because I know this is bigger than me. We will see God do great things because it’s not something ‘Ed ordained’ or had a ‘five-step plan’ for. Ed had no clue. This wasn’t on my radar or resume, but I can’t imagine doing anything else.”

The Woodfield Park neighborhood was originally built as off campus housing for those serving at Fort Jackson. Today, demographics reflect great racial and ethnic immigrant diversity in the community and show that a majority of residents live below the poverty line. Nearby living conditions include subsidized housing, trailer parks, apartments, and single-family housing, often with multiple families living together.

In recent years Woodfield Park Baptist struggled against mounting challenges to effectively reach its community. This led Pastor Jeff Phillips and former CMBA Director of Missions George Bullard to hold formal discussions in 2020 with the remaining church members about future options. An association-wide collaboration interest meeting was held onsite in May 2022 and, with the help of a CMBA coaching team and church partners within the association’s footprint, plans began to materialize for the planting of New Creation.

“I can see God’s fingerprint on the whole story at Woodfield Park - from the Chapel at Fort Jackson to the faithfulness of the church through the years working to reach the community, to this next chapter of New Creation Baptist Church,” said Bill Wright, who served as a CMBA coach to Woodfield Park members. “The mission has not changed to give a gospel witness in the community and beyond. I am so thankful for the vision of and faithfulness of Woodfield Park to ensure that presence and witness continues.”

“The first time I met with the core group at Woodfield, it seemed obvious to me that whatever God was going to do would be a radical transformation for all involved,” says Freddy Johnson, who also served in a coaching capacity during the process. Johnson notes former Pastor Phillips’ humble obedience to God’s ultimate leading for the church, watching members embrace the replanting idea, and realizing Stewart’s call to the new church as special blessings in the experience.

Stewart had been serving as the Adult Discipleship pastor at Shandon Baptist and participated in meetings and discussions around partnership efforts to reach residents of Woodfield Park. He mentions being struck by how the existing building “really is a true neighborhood church,” surrounded on all sides by houses. He had ongoing conversations with other Shandon staff members about how their church might be able to partner in the project.

“Then [Associational Missions Strategist] Jamie Rogers invited me to coffee to ask about my thoughts on Woodfield Park,” Stewart says of a fateful January 2023 meeting. The conversation evolved, and Rogers

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asked Stewart to take the lead. It was an idea that “hadn’t entered my thoughts, not even an option I considered,” Stewart says, noting he’s served for 27 years at Shandon.

As Stewart prayed about this opportunity, he became convinced that God was calling him to become a lead pastor and church planter. He met with the remaining Woodfield Park members, who voted to move forward with the replanting process. Then, with his family’s unanimous support and the blessing of Shandon’s leadership, Stewart jumped headfirst into the necessary meetings, assessments, and trainings before starting to work part time in the new role in the summer of 2023.

New Creation’s core planting team consists of eight Shandon members, including Stewart’s family. Some long-time family friends and several former Woodfield Park Baptist members round out the team, which has met regularly leading up to the launch. With the help of CMBA partner churches, New Creation has increased its presence in the community through intentional outreach including an open house event, Fall Festival, prayer walking, and following up on personal contacts.

Stewart says that in the first few months following the launch the team will focus on providing a strong Sunday worship service, creating a community “hub” to engage single parents and grandparents raising young children, and covering it all in prayer because “if we’re doing anything significant, we need God and can only get His blessing and favor from staying on our knees.”

Collaboration has been essential in launching New Creation, something Rogers is “so encouraged” to witness among CMBA’s Family of Churches. He calls it “associational partnership at its finest. There will be many more efforts just like this one in our future.”

CMBA churches have supported the new church financially by serving onsite, and sending people to join the launch team. Participating churches include City of Refuge, Concord Fellowship, First Baptist Columbia, North Trenholm, Shandon, and Spring Valley. Stewart reports that financial gifts have enabled critical facility improvements, including replacing four HVAC units and damaged windows.

“The facilities are in good shape now to use as a place for children to do homework, get fed, be tutored, and for us to make connections and build relationships with people,” Stewart says. “If we can feed, build relationships with and pray over people, we can share the gospel and see people come to faith in Christ.”

The sermon in New Creation’s first worship service will be based on 2 Corinthians 5:17, the inspiration for the church’s name. “As a seven-year-old child I gave my life to Christ because of this verse. It explains the change that comes from an encounter with Jesus, and at New Creation we want to see lives transformed through Him,” Stewart explains.

That ministry dream includes even more in the years to come. Stewart wants to “see this building buzzing five to six days a week” through English as a Second Language classes, mentoring, recreation, and an operational food pantry one day. He views New Creation’s facilities as a resource meant to be shared, while preparing it to be used by future generations and leaders.

“I’m eternally grateful for CMBA. If they hadn’t been involved and cared for Woodfield Park, I wouldn’t even know about this neighborhood or have ever driven down this road. Because CMBA cared, this has changed my life,” Stewart says.

The CMBA Family of Churches is encouraged to continue partnering with New Creation to reach the Woodfield Park community. Contact Stewart by phone at 803.509.4001 or by email at Ed@ncbccola.org for more information.

“This is God’s work. I pray God will do a work so big in this community that only He will get the praise for it,” Stewart says. “Let’s advance the Gospel together!”