

MEET PTS



# CHURCH PLANTING STUDENT LEADS MULTICULTURAL CHURCH TO LOVE GOD AND NEIGHBORS

The Rev. Gad Mpoyo—organizing pastor of Shalom International ministries—moved from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Atlanta, Ga., to study. But a conversation with a Kenyan friend in the States moved him further. It moved him to begin a ministry in Clarkston, Ga.—a city of 8,000 people that is, perhaps, the most ethnically diverse community in the United States.

A ministry with roots dating to 2008 by way of door-to-door visits by Gad (who speaks five languages), Shalom International has, since 2011, “offer[ed] a space of divine worship, radical hospitality, learning, and spiritual healing.” The multicultural church includes members not only from Gad’s home country but also from Zambia, Cameroon, Congo Brazzaville, Bhutan, Burma, Nepal, Angola, Togo, and more.

Its mission? “To love God and our neighbors by responding to their spiritual, social, and emotional needs by being the church,” in fulfillment of God’s call in Jeremiah 29:7 to “seek the shalom of the community.”

To become even better equipped for this mission, Gad recently enrolled in Pittsburgh Seminary’s **Church Planting and Revitalization Certificate** program.

“It feels like yesterday when a group of 11 immigrants and refugees came to our house to worship, praise, pray, and dream together about what the Lord was about to do in the Clarkston community,” Gad recalls. “We have come a long way. Who could have imagined that today Shalom would have a lively children’s ministry that provides a safe space for children between the ages of three to 15? Who could have thought that Shalom would have a vibrant youth ministry that gathers young people from different part of Africa and helps them learn what it means to be a Christian? Who could have predicted that Shalom could successfully launch an initiative that not only responds to the academic needs of our children but also offers a safe environment where middle school students are offered healthy snacks, enrichment activities (in sports, arts, engineering, team-building, etc.), homework assistance, academic lessons, and even a home visitation program to help the family get involved in their children’s education?” celebrates Gad. And Shalom has also developed small-group adult Bible studies to encourage Christian faith and discipleship and strengthen the church’s sense of community.

This wide array of ministries “geared toward bringing the community to us” has, in part, been made possible by partner Presbyterian churches—North Decatur, Memorial Drive, Shallowford, Morningside, and the now-closed Midway—thanks to the leadership of the PCUSA’s New Church Development Commission. And recently, Atlanta’s Peachtree PC bought hundreds of urgently needed Bibles in many languages for Shalom members and their friends. “Thanks to all the support we continue to receive, I have been able to work as Shalom’s full-time pastor since November 2015,” notes Gad.

“While it is true that we have come a long way, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done,” he adds. For example, leadership development within Shalom has been a major focus for the past three years, with the central goal of all these efforts being to make disciples for Christ. “We cannot do it by ourselves—we need participating partners in what God has already done and is still doing in Clarkston. Something good is happening here—come and see for yourself!” says Gad.

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