

## THE AFRICA ITINERARY

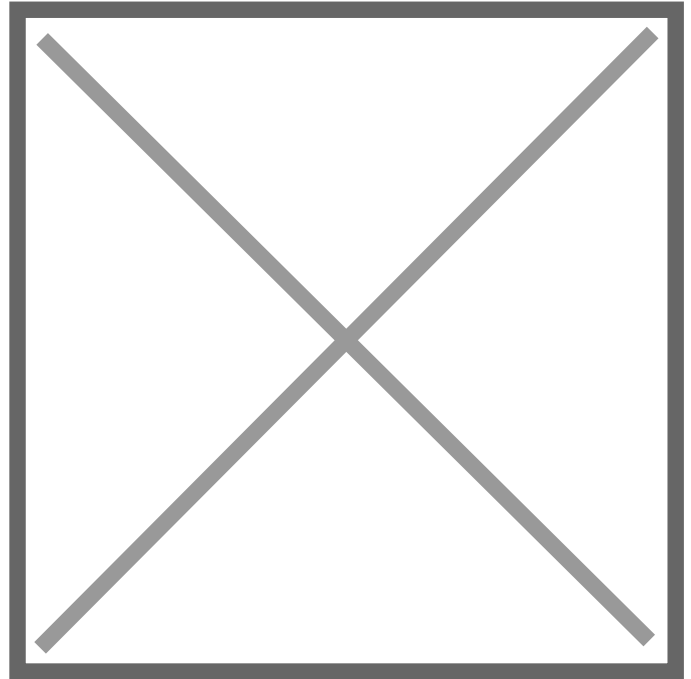
Majors Victor and Rose-Marie Leslie led the Western Territory team to South Africa and Zambia. Three of us were students, five were African-American; and while we ranged in age from 17 to 73, we shared the desire to learn how The Salvation Army in Africa is addressing the HIV/AIDS epidemic. And we asked the Lord to use us to take this message home.

In Johannesburg, South Africa we stayed in the training college, where we danced and sang Zulu songs into the night with dynamic young cadets. Our first trip was to the Carl Sithole Social Centre in Soweto where The Salvation Army became the first organization to embrace abandoned HIV-infected children. Bethesda House cares for abandoned HIV/AIDS-infected children ages 3 to 5, and Bethany Children's Home cares for HIV/AIDS-infected or affected youth, ages 6 to 18. According to Captain Magdeline Phore, 90 percent of these children have been sexually abused. They attend school with children from the community at Bethany Combined School.

Next, we visited Ethembeni Children's Home where we cradled little ones like Michelle Rose, abandoned under a bridge on a freezing winter morning when she was just one week old.

We then headed to Kwazulu Natal where Divisional Commander, Major Bernie Harms, drove us to Mountain View Hospital, a haven for TB and AIDS patients. The next day we visited the Abaqulusi Child Survival Project, supported by SAWSO and USAID. We were impressed by the high level of training for 100 community health workers as we visited programs for immunization, nutrition, hygiene and education.

We left South Africa for Zambia, where our hosts were Captains Kennedy and Mary Mizinga. From DHQ in Lusaka we headed south to Chikankata where we stayed several days. From there, Mizinga drove us throughout Zambia. At Ngwenya, we visited a school owned and managed by the community to educate orphans and vulnerable children. We met people living with AIDS who grow crops to keep them strong during antiretroviral therapy (ART). At the Livingstone Corps, Anna Muchimba, a nurse who has AIDS, led a support group for those with HIV/AIDS (see Major Victor Leslie's column, "I choose life," in *New Frontier*, Vol. 24 No. 17, Oct. 11 2006). At Kalomo Village and Kawama Corps, young Zambians performed skits advocating abstinence and illustrating how income-generating



projects can save girls from the lure of sex-for-economic survival. At Kabushi Corps, youths praised RAPIDS in poetry.

We fell deeply and irrevocably in love with Africa's beauty and her people, a people so infused with the spirit of the Lord we were humbled in their presence.

It is through the church that an amazing change is taking place. In the midst of overwhelming tragedy and unimaginable poverty, the community is taking care of its own and generating income. Some make charcoal, some create cooking pots, others grow corn or catch fish and dry them in the sun. Standing steady and strong behind all that is happening is The Salvation Army, providing the sick with medicine, supporting the caregivers, teaching literacy and business skills, and making sure that there are not the kinds of "hand-outs" that strip dignity. The Salvation Army demonstrates the reality of a gracious God who provides for his people.