

SHORT TERM TEAM ORIENTATION TO SOUTH AFRICA

A BRIEF RECENT HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICA AND THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF KWAMHLANGA, SOUTH AFRICA

- In 1912, the African National Congress (ANC) was formed to fight for black African rights against British colonial government then ruling South Africa.
- In 1948, South Africa's National Party (NP) was elected to power and the NP began to legalize the system of apartheid they inherited from the British colonial government. This system separated the country's population into racial and tribal groups: Various Black Tribes, Coloureds, Asians, and Whites.
- In South Africa, if you were born an African, Coloured, or Asian, it meant that your life was circumscribed by racist traditions illegally practiced for centuries which in 1948 became laws and regulations that crippled the growth, dimmed the potential, and stunted the lives of blacks.
- In 1960, the ANC was banned and at that stage the ANC, along with other political groups, started a guerilla campaign against the National Party.
- During this Cold War era many prominent ANC members supported Communist ideology. This in turn led many white Christians to believe they were fighting communism. They saw it as their Christian duty - according to Romans 13 - to give their lives to uphold the white nationalist government and to maintain law and order in the country.
- In 1961, Nelson Mandela went underground to continue the Freedom Struggle. It became a violent struggle. In the guerilla war many blacks and whites died.
- In South Africa many ANC leaders were imprisoned. Nelson Mandela was arrested and jailed in 1962. Officials moved him to prison on Robben Island in 1963.
- Because of century long tribal hatred and clashes between several black groups, some tribal leaders requested the white national government to assist them in establishing their own homeland governments (reservations) where they could govern themselves. In the 1970's the KwaNdebele area became a self-governing homeland for the Ndebele tribe.

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- Sharpeville, Soweto, Sophiatown and other townships were set up in order to provide temporary accommodation to African residents until they would one day be moved to their homelands. This temporary accommodation, however, became permanent and laws were enacted to keep blacks in these poorest areas and away from urban areas where whites resided.
- In July 1985, a State of Emergency was declared that gave police broad powers in dealing with black protesters and large scale violence. Tensions increased dramatically at this stage. Hundreds of people were brutally killed in townships, including those suspected of being traitors in support of the government.
- Peter William Botha resigned in 1989, and Frederik Willem de Klerk took office and began implementing a series of reforms.
- South Africa was in turmoil. Both internal and international pressures led the National Party to consider Constitutional change.
- In 1990, after 27 years in prison for the freedom of his people, Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners were released from prison and negotiations for power sharing between all groups in the country were finally being considered.
- Nearly all apartheid provisions were abolished in 1991, and after much negotiation, Mandela and de Klerk won the Noble Peace Prize in 1993 for their efforts to promote a peaceful transition to a new democratic dispensation in South Africa.
- April 27, 1994 was the date for the first ever national, non-racial, one-person-one-vote election. For the first time in South African history, the black majority would go to the polls to elect their own leaders.
- In May 1994, Nelson Mandela was sworn in as President and South Africa entered a new period of its history.
- Two National Anthems (one Afrikaans, one African nationalists), a new flag, new names for old apartheid-era places, free school lunches for all children, new housing projects, better health care, and the promotion of both white and black values all became part of the campaign and South Africa's transformation.
- In 1996 President Nelson Mandela formally announced that he would not seek another term as president and would recommend Deputy President Thabo Mbeki to succeed him in 1999.

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- After years of negotiations, a new constitution was approved in December 1996 and entered into force in February 1997. It was implemented in stages and included barring discrimination on any basis, including race, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, language, religion, and physical disability, the constitution guarantees broad freedoms of speech and association and is considered one of the most liberal in the world.
- South Africa today faces challenges such as black poverty, land rights, job creation, affirmative action, massive corruption, unemployment, poor educational system, housing, high crime, a tremendously high rate of emigration of highly skilled people but has overcome a multitude of discord, segregation and political violence. A main cause of these problems is a lack of trust and communication between the different cultures of South Africa.

THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF KWAMHLANGA, SOUTH AFRICA

- ROAD WORKS ministers in KwaMhlanga, South Africa. This is the original KwaNdebele Homeland, where the Ndebele people were located before, during and now after the apartheid movement.
- Today, this area is made up of mostly Northern Sotho, Southern Ndebele, as well as small pockets of Isizulu, Isixhosa, and Isivenda speaking people. There are vast differences between these language groups.
- This is considered a rural area and traditional African ways of life are still mostly practiced. This is an animistic society, which means that the African worldview is a perspective controlled by spirits (mostly ancestral spirits) and forces that pervade life. Ancestor Worship is a practice that is still very common among the people of this community. Many Christians mix forms and legacies of ancestral worship with Christianity. **Remember that you are living among a culture that considers your ways and traditions more unusual than those in which you are seeing on a daily basis in this area.**

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- The African Traditional Religion (ATR) believes that spirits (especially ancestral spirits), demons, etc. can be consulted and/or manipulated for protection, or for promotion of personal interests.
- Sacrifices made (like a white chicken, or a goat or a cow) in the African Culture are intended to avert sickness, promote recovery from illness, avert failures in business, or some other form of misfortune which is attributed to evil spirits or witchcraft.
- Sangomas are witch doctors that are consulted by many Africans (as priests, alternative medical doctors or psychiatrists) to deal with spiritual influences which are believed to lie behind all experiences. Through rituals, Sangomas determine the cause of the trouble and then give medicine, exorcise evil spirits, conduct a witch hunt to discover the guilty person or sell charms to protect you from evil. **The power and influence of traditional sangomas should not be underestimated.** The majority of them use a variety of occult practices to perform their services.
- African Traditional Religion finds expression in rituals, ceremonies, festivals, shrines, sacred places, religious objects, dancing, riddles, myths and legends of former heroes and victories. The Christian Churches constantly face a challenge of syncretism where many of these old traditional beliefs and practices are mixed with biblical beliefs.
- It is common to have lengthy greetings in the African culture. Expect a special, slow, triple handshake with an African man and woman. Greet everyone with this same handshake.
- In this culture, older people should be treated with utmost respect.
- When you meet a group of people, it is necessary to greet each person in that group. If you are not able to greet everyone, it is appropriate to greet the oldest person first.
- Children and teenagers wait for you to greet them. They also never initiate conversation with an elder.
- In African context, time is not measured by the clock, but rather by events that happen.

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- In African culture, thoughts of the future are virtually absent, because events that lie in it have not taken place. There is no concept of history moving forward. The focus is on the past, with ancestors playing a large role in the here and now. After physical death, the person is still thought to exist and to have power in his society.
- The African community celebrates four 'passage rites'-Birth, Puberty, Marriage & Death.
- Water is a precious resource. Please use it conservatively. Be careful not to waste food.

Vehicle theft and carjacking is a problem in South Africa

1. Always keep your vehicle locked and valuables out of sight.
2. Never leave your keys in the ignition.
3. Never pick up strangers/hitchhikers.
4. Don't stop on the side of the road for any reason.
5. If at all possible never travel alone and always have a reliable map with you.

Money matters

1. White people are normally seen as wealthy and are often targeted by beggars. In general avoid giving money to beggars, especially children and older men.
2. Avoid carrying large sums of cash.
3. You can use your personal ATM Card at any ATM machine in South Africa. That is the easiest way to access money.
4. Always keep your ATM card in a safe place and protect your PIN carefully.
5. Try and limit cash withdrawals to times when you are in the city and in a public place such as a bank or shopping mall. Also try to make withdrawals during normal working hours. Be alert and aware of everything and everyone around you when using an ATM. If you do not feel comfortable for any reason, then leave immediately and find another ATM.

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6. When making a withdrawal stand close to the ATM and use your hand and the rest of your body to block the keypad when you punch in your PIN.
7. Once you have received your money and receipt, put it away quickly and do not count your money in public.
8. It is never necessary for anyone to know your PIN.
9. Always be sure that when you leave the ATM machine you still have your ATM Card.
10. Be cautious when using your Credit/Debit Card at a grocery store, coffee house, restaurant or any vendor, because the receipts in South Africa print out your entire bank card number and expiration.

Miscellaneous issues

1. No vaccinations are required to enter South Africa but we do recommend updating your tetanus and hepatitis vaccinations.
2. No visas are required to enter South Africa, but you will need a valid passport.
3. There is no malaria in this part of South Africa, but you should check other destinations you plan travel to for malaria warnings.
4. Please be aware that TB is prevalent in the communities we are working in. You will be exposed to the bacteria that causes TB. This does not mean that you will get TB but you will be exposed to it.

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Do you agree or disagree?

1. HIV positive people who have children are selfish.
2. Churches contribute to the vulnerability of women to HIV infection.
3. HIV positive people should not get married.
4. Every person is only responsible for his/her own health; therefore an HIV positive person does not have to disclose his/her status to a new sexual partner.
5. People who are infected with HIV have only themselves to blame.
6. Sex is a topic that should be addressed in Church.
7. People with high-risk behavior are usually not church members.
8. The majority of HIV positive people are infected because they were sleeping around.

HIV/AIDS Awareness By Randy Finkbeiner

What is HIV/AIDS?

Often we speak of HIV and AIDS together but it is important to distinguish between the two. HIV and AIDS are not the same thing although HIV does cause AIDS.

HIV stands for **human immunodeficiency virus**:

Human because it only infects human beings;

Immunodeficiency, because it attacks and destroys the body's immune system; and

Virus, because it shares characteristics with other viruses that are not common to living cells. A person living with HIV is often times not aware they are infected and can look

healthy and live a normal life for many years. Because the virus breaks down the immune system slowly, that person then becomes a transmitter of the virus without being aware that he or she is spreading the virus to others. HIV causes AIDS when the virus has broken down the immune system to the point where the body becomes susceptible to opportunistic infections.

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AIDS stands for **Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome**. The most common opportunistic infections in the South African context are TB and other lung infections such as pneumonia. In the province of Mpumalanga, the official HIV rate is about 35% of the adult population. In our municipality of Thembasile, the official rate is closer to 40% but my experience tells me the rate of infection is closer to 50%.

How is HIV Contracted/Transmitted?

HIV is transmitted through bodily fluids. HIV is most highly concentrated in blood, semen, and vaginal fluids. Because of this the most common forms of transmission are through sex, although it can also be transmitted through needle sharing and from mother to child. In South Africa, HIV has been transmitted primarily through heterosexual relationships, and women have been most vulnerable. Women account for nearly 70% of all infections. HIV is also present in sweat, tears, saliva, urine and feces but in such low amounts that there is very low to no risk of transmission from these fluids. HIV is very fragile outside the human body and quickly degrades. For your peace of mind, you should know that HIV cannot be contracted through coughing or sneezing, through sharing a glass of water, from a toilet seat, or from shaking hands, or sharing food. There has never been a reported case of HIV infection through the environment or from an insect bite.

How does HIV break down the immune system?

In very simple terms, HIV attaches itself to a host cell and uses that cell to replicate itself. The cell that HIV attaches itself to is part of the immune system called the T-helper cell, also called the CD4 cell. This particular cell gives orders to the rest of the immune system to fight infection. HIV takes over the CD4 cell and uses it as a factory to make more HIV. In this way, HIV slowly takes over and incapacitates the body's immune system.

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What factors complicate HIV/AIDS in rural South African communities?

There are many complex factors but many are rooted in poverty. Poverty has created desperation which has made women especially vulnerable. There is pressure to provide for children that has caused some to turn to sex work. Some young orphan girls also use sex for food as a means of survival. There are myths, such as sex with a virgin will cure AIDS. Rape is widespread and often not reported. There is societal pressure to prove that a woman can have children at an early age. Women are also looked upon as possessions of men, and women often have no power in their sexual relationships with their partners. Then there is the issue of stigma associated with being HIV positive. In South Africa, families will reject another HIV positive family member. The community, even the church, will sometimes reject an infected person. An infected person is often looked upon as cursed or bewitched and then there is an accompanied fear of association with that person. Because of these stigmas, many people will not be open about their status. In most cases people do not even want to know their status and fear being tested. Because of all these factors, you should be very sensitive if someone discloses their status to you. **YOU SHOULD ALWAYS CONSIDER SOMEONE'S STATUS AS CONFIDENTIAL.** You may have the opportunity to do a home visit during your stay in South Africa with a home based care worker. While you may be aware that someone in the home is HIV positive, they may not have disclosed this to their own family members, so be sensitive about this issue. Let the home based care workers do their job while you observe. Be encouraging to the families and pray for them.

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What are the treatment options in South Africa? And what is the ARV availability in this area?

ARV stands for Antiretroviral and it is a group of medications that slow down the reproduction of the virus in the body. It is not a cure but it does prolong life. ARV treatment was not really an option in South Africa until 2004 and in our area until late 2005. The government has been resistant to offering ARV treatment, and there has been much controversy about this. UNAIDS estimated that at the end of 2005, 79% of South Africans who needed treatment were not getting it. Recent UNAIDS statistics show that 1,000 people die everyday in South Africa of an AIDS-related illness. The following are the steps that need to be taken to qualify for free ARV treatment: You must first go to your local clinic and be tested for HIV. If the test is positive, then your CD4 count will be measured. If your CD4 count is below 200, your local clinic will refer you to a specialized AIDS clinic. The AIDS Clinic will then assess liver function to see if ARV treatment can be started. On any given day you will find over 100 people waiting to see the doctor at this clinic. A complication in getting treatment is that many people do not have the money for transportation or are not physically capable of getting to the clinic. Many people in this area who are HIV positive also test positive for TB. If that is the case, they must first start on a course of TB treatment before they can begin ARV treatment. Complications for those on ARVs and TB treatment are that the medications themselves can have severe side effects. ARVs must be taken twice a day, everyday, at the same time, for life. They must also be taken with food. In many cases, people do not have food and if you try to take ARV's without food, you can become very ill.