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By Therese I. Poirier

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## Itinerary and What I Learned

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Nearby we walked the Company Gardens, which was the site of gardens planted by the Dutch East India Company that served as a refreshment stopover for ships traveling from Europe to East India. In the Company Gardens stands a statue of Cecil Rhodes who was a financier and empire builder of British South Africa. The visit to the District Six Museum was a poignant reminder of the impact of Apartheid. It reminded me of the disgraceful segregation movement in the United States, and also the horrors of the Holocaust on the Jewish people. Personally, I was inspired by leaders who helped to end the Apartheid movement, including Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu and Oliver Tambo. The view of Bo Kaap, a colorful Muslim neighborhood, affirms the freedom of expression after the end of Apartheid era. *"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins."* (1 Peter 4:8 NIV). *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart*

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### **Rovos Rail through South Africa and Zimbabwe**

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My reflections on Rhodes affirmed that the European colonization of Africa was motivated by the greed for gold, diamonds and a route to the Far East. *“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”* (1 Tim 6:10 NIV). The tour group had discussions on the pros and cons of European colonization.<sup>4</sup> Colonization brought benefits like medicine, education, literacy, improved infrastructure, and Christianity to Africa. However, it also partly destroyed the culture of Africa and did not reflect cultural competency. It exploited the natural resources and destroyed the landscape. It forced assimilation and subjected the people to the rules of the colonists. It dehumanized the African labor force and forced people to convert to Christianity. It is likely that if there was adherence to principles of cultural competency, Africa and its people would be in better economic shape. It would have reduced the threat of endangered species by preserving the natural landscape and the natural habitats of the wildlife. Colonization even made me consider the disadvantages of missionary outreach in Africa. Christianity was one justification used by Europeans to colonize and exploit Africa. However, Christianity ultimately destabilized the status quo and brought opportunities for the country but undermined the power of Africans. The worldview on missionary outreach was that Christianity was a white man’s religion used to subdue and control the black people in the process of colonization. As a result of this trip, my knowledge regarding the influence of European

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based on width and height, which makes it a World Heritage Site. I learned about David Livingston who was a physician, missionary, explorer (the first to travel the width of central Africa), and discoverer (he identified Victoria Falls and named it after Queen Victoria). In addition, he was a liberator: he helped to sensitize Britain to the East Africa slave trade and influence William Wilberforce to end the slave trade. As a Christian, Livingston stated, "God send me anywhere, only go with me."

We visited an orphanage where we engaged with a 7-month-old infant who was abandoned by her 13-year old mother. We also visited a senior housing complex in Victoria Falls which is a new concept in this area. Normally families take care of the elderly; but with the high prevalence of HIV, more elderly have been left with no families. The lack of respect for women in this part of the world is appalling, as indicated by the high incidence of rape and HIV. But the number one threat



in many parts of Africa is the lack of clean water due to the poverty and lack of rainfall.

### Conclusion

When asked at our closing farewell dinner what was the highlight of the trip, my answer was: "The people." I marveled at the joy and peace that most of them have, even though they are very poor and have very few possessions. My other highlight was the beauty of the vegetation and the wildlife in their natural habitat, which reaffirmed to me that God provides for all His creation. Prior to this trip I would never have envisioned serving as a missionary in Africa... I only wish I had this insight when I was much younger. There are so many needs to be met, so please join me in prayer that God will intervene and send the help that is desperately needed.

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*Therese I. Poirier, PharmD, MPH, FASHP, FCCP is Professor Emeritus at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. She is also an AACP Distinguished Teaching Scholar and SIUE's Paul Simon Teacher Scholar. She worked as an educator for 42 years. She is a member of the Calvary Baptist Church in Edwardsville, IL.*