

# Continuing Indaba and Governance Processes

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Each province of the Anglican Communion has a different governance processes at provincial and diocesan level. The aim is for episcopal leadership to be accompanied by governance processes that include laity, clergy and bishops. Good governance is an essential part of the life of all our churches and that can come in many forms. Governance structures often reflect the cultural practices of democracy in different contexts and many follow a form of 'parliamentary' systems based upon enlightenment principles of debate and majority voting.

## Motivation for using Indaba

Parliamentary structures tend to emphasise either unanimity, or polarisation. They are not necessarily the best way to value diversity and enable disagreement to be handled constructively. They tend to favour those in power and not to hear the voices of all. On matters of significance they tend to create two sides, where a multiplicity of opinions may be more appropriate.

An American observer to process in a Diocesan Synod in the Sudan was amazed that some significant decisions were made by a process of engaged conversation – an 'Indaba' – rather than speeches for and against. This enabled action to emerge.

Polarised debates can end not in action, but a renewed determination by the losers to reverse the defeat at future sessions, rather than a common mind on how to walk together with difference.

Continuing Indaba may be used within or alongside such processes in Deanery Synods, Diocesan Conventions, General Synods, and other governance structures. Such a process requires the allocation of time and resources, but can be of great benefit.

When governance bodies have reached an impasse they may seek to use facilitated conversations in order to seek a way through their problems. They may use such conversations to enable the discussion of significant issues that do not require the passing of a resolution.

Such facilitated conversations may helpfully use principles of Continuing Indaba, but they will be limited in their application. Other approaches such as consensus processes or mediation may be relevant alternatives.

This page is concerned with Continuing Indaba and Governance structures.

## Why use Indaba in Governance

The big questions facing the church in every diocese and province require the involvement of all in forming a response and owning application. Continuing Indaba can enable a church to face its biggest questions through a process of discerning the will of God.

In order to develop a coherent response it may be necessary to develop an understanding of the common life of the body. In order to move forwards together when considering issues of conflict and reconciliation it is important that a wide range of voices are heard.

A process of journey together enables potential protagonists to understand one another's motivations and to together for a way forward. It enables a common direction to emerge that can result in real action that may, or may not require governance accent.

It can set the priorities that need to be matched by allocation of resources, but it cannot be used to replace good budgeting practices, or to short cut decisions.

Care must be taken for it not to become a process of forcing through the desires of a powerful lobby or to avoid difficult conversations.

Indaba can be used to consider the really important issues facing a church that are not suitable to consideration in other ways. The church may have passed a motion supporting evangelistic initiatives, but for these to take effect they may need to engage in a different process.

## **Outcomes**

Continuing Indaba can be used to develop relationships so honest conversations can enable trust to grow among the members of the governance body.

This can enable a common understanding of the spiritual life of the province or diocese that enables decisions to be made in the interest of the whole based on an appreciation of the local issues.

Where contentious change is proposed, it seeks to gain acceptance for action from the whole, not as a negative compromise, but as a positive choice.

It seeks to deliver a way forwards that enables us to be open to one another even when we are still divided on matters of significance.

## **Governance and Indaba**

There are two main ways in which Indaba can be used alongside governance:

1. An entire meeting can suspend normal business and follow a process designed to enable elected representatives to concentrate on a significant framing question. They may need to have a short business meeting to ensure that legal requirements are fulfilled.
2. A process may be designed for a wider group that runs in parallel to governance, reporting back and shaping resolutions.
3. Indaba becomes the way of life of the governance.

The diversity of governance, even in one province means that design needs to be specific to context. Here are some guiding principles.

## **The living Indaba**

Continuing Indaba celebrates diversity and recognises that a living breathing church will be full of difference and conflict. Enabling people to enter into direct conversation with one another requires that patterns of identification only with those who are similar are challenged. This may be uncomfortable, but it is the first step on the journey.

It is common for governance structures to develop patterns of behaviour. For example, parish representatives will often sit together in diocesan synod or convention. It is common for people to

gather in affinity groups, defined by a position on an issue or by age, gender or ethnicity. In some synods bishops sit together separate from the clergy and laity.

It is important not to isolate people. If someone realises that they are the only person in a small group who holds a specific view, or comes from a specific cultural context, they may feel specifically vulnerable. Such isolation should be avoided.

While people may be elected to represent they are also elected for who they are. It is important that people speak for themselves and not on behalf of people who are not in the room.

If there are people not present, for example young people, there should be a processes of inviting people from that group so that they are included. This is essential, especially when the topic being discussed is about, or will affect these people.

## **Design of process**

The leadership of the appropriate convenor - bishop for a diocese, primate for a province, or Area Dean or Archdeacon for a deanery is vital in establishing a Continuing Indaba process to run alongside governance process. But it is not enough. The process will need to gain ownership from within those elected to governance body and from the wider church.

The convening body in this case will need to be the standing committee or equivalent of the governance structure. It will need to gain accent by laity and clergy as well as bishops.

Where there are issues of deep difference and conflict established lobby groups will fear compromise. Those they trust should be included in ownership of the process to ensure their concerns are heard.

## **Communication**

The convening body will need to communicate intent to the whole of the church, including those elected to governance bodies. The aims and objectives, rational for using Indaba, and the leaders' vision for the process, will need to be clearly identified. This communication should include a short description of Indaba and the expected process.

## **The venue**

The venue needs to be appropriate for Indaba. In addition to the space for a plenary there needs to be areas for small group to meet, including space for all those at the gathering to meet in circles in groups of no more than 15.

## **Practicalities**

There needs to be a person, who is part of the planning team, responsible for making sure the practical arrangements are in place. This might include anything from booking the venue (taking into account facilitation requirements, access needs, etc) to organising resources (such as pens, papers printing etc) to making sure invitations are sent out. This person will work closely with the facilitators on the day to ensure that all goes smoothly.

## **Commitment**

Continuing Indaba, in any form, requires commitment to the whole journey. It is difficult to form relationships and develop the space to have honest conversation if people come and go.

The Indaba element of a governance meeting only works if there is a commitment is to being present for the whole time, not to slip away to take a phone call or reply to an email. Or to caucus with special interest groups.

## **Facilitation**

Trust needs to be placed in the hands of a facilitation team with a lead facilitator. Facilitators will bring a variety of skills and methods to the process; however it is important that their practice, while facilitating an Indaba, be guided by the Facilitation Guide materials available on [www.continuingindaba.com](http://www.continuingindaba.com) or by contacting the Anglican Communion office.

## **Recording and reporting**

When Continuing Indaba is used in combination with other governance structures accurate recording and faithful reporting is vital. This will vary from meeting to meeting and it is essential that this is thought through carefully before the gathering. For more on this see the guide on recording and reporting in Indaba [Published December 2013 on [www.continuingindaba.com](http://www.continuingindaba.com)]