

Introducing “*Indaba*”

In the Spirit of Mutual Conversation and Consolation Metropolitan New York Synod – For Such a Time as This

What is *Indaba*?

Indaba is a Zulu word from Africa which means gathering for purposeful discussion. It is a simple, straightforward, and adaptable method of engaging one another in which we listen and learn about the opportunities and challenges that face us in our various communities of faith.

Why *Indaba*?

Indaba can help us deepen our appreciation for and understanding of the amazing and diverse gatherings of people and resources that God has brought together in our synod.

- ✦ God in Christ through the Holy Spirit is present in spiritual conversations, for Jesus promised that “where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20).
- ✦ *Indaba* is a faith practice that relates to Mutual Conversation and Consolation, one of the means of grace listed by Luther alongside preaching, baptism, Eucharist, and confession and forgiveness.
- ✦ *Indaba* brings us closer together and builds Christian community. Think of it this way: the Holy Spirit works through these holy conversations to knit together the individual body parts, constituting us as the body of Christ, the church.
- ✦ *Indaba* allows us to come together and engage one another on matters of concern across differing cultures without breaking the bonds of community. With greater understanding and deepened bonds of affection, we will be better equipped to join together in God’s mission.

But when it is all said and done, *Indaba* is an end in itself, for good conversation is a great gift from God, especially when we have the privileged and holy experience in relationship of being known, seen, and heard for who we really are as children of God.



When and where can we do *Indaba*?

Anytime and anywhere the church gathers is a good time and place to practice *Indaba*.

- ✦ You can schedule special occasions for *Indaba*, convening particular groups that represent the diversity of our communities. And/or you can incorporate into already existing groups, events, and meetings the practice of *Indaba*.
- ✦ It is especially compelling to incorporate *Indaba* into committee and congregation council meetings, taking some time at the beginning of each meeting to engage in conversation around one or two inviting questions. This helps set a more cooperative tone for the meeting.

One might argue that we don't have time in a busy world for such luxury of conversation. One might counter that we don't have the time NOT to do something like *Indaba*, for experience demonstrates that spiritual conversation which deepens bonds of affection actually can make meetings go more smoothly and efficiently.

Who may practice *Indaba*?

Indaba is ideal for small groups (perhaps four to eight participants) in congregations and local ministry settings, but especially also beyond a particular local setting where God's people will benefit from getting to know each other better.

- ✦ This may mean neighboring ELCA congregations in a particular area or conference of our synod.
- ✦ It may mean ecumenical and perhaps interfaith partners.
- ✦ It may involve secular partners in the shared work of addressing community needs.
- ✦ It may mean bringing people together from various parts of our synod, especially small groups intentionally formed that represent our wide diversity of cultures, ethnicities and circumstances, diversity in its many aspects which God calls us to honor and to celebrate.

How do we do *Indaba*?

Indaba is about listening and learning about the many different circumstantial and cultural contexts for mission in our Metropolitan New York Synod.

- ✦ It uses a Mutual Invitation Model for conversation, inviting others to speak and giving everyone a chance to speak.
- ✦ It's about listening respectfully, using "I" statements, not "You" statements.
- ✦ *Indaba*, or any healthy conversation really, implies a covenant among participants informed by mutually agreed upon expectations for conduct.
 - ✦ Toward this end, see an accompanying document, "Guiding Norms for Holy Conversations," at www.mnys.org/growinginfaith



***Indaba* invites prayer for one another, both privately and publicly. It's all about relationship, staying in touch.**

Finally, *Indaba* invites prayer for one another, both privately and publicly. It's all about relationship, staying in touch.

Indaba is not a prescribed program with a lot of steps to follow. Rather, it is really all about being intentional in taking the time and spending the energy to genuinely talk with one another. Such intentional conversation is served well if you have guiding questions in mind.

Getting started

Here are some possible questions to focus an *Indaba* conversation:

- ✦ What is God up to in your congregation or ministry setting that most excites you?
- ✦ What are the greatest challenges faced by your congregation or ministry setting that may inhibit your engagement in God's mission for the sake of the world?
- ✦ What do you most wish that others would understand about your culture and circumstances?
- ✦ What would you say are your church's distinctive spiritual gifts?
- ✦ What best describes our part in God's mission?
- ✦ What things bind us together in unity in Christian community?
- ✦ What are your hopes and dreams as we live into the vision of God's future?
- ✦ What is the most spiritually significant thing that happened in your life today?



Or you can generate other questions appropriate to your ministry context. But keep it simple, maybe only one or two questions for an *Indaba* session. The goal is to open up conversation that we may get to know each other better and deepen our relationships.

A format for the practice of *Indaba*

- ✦ A leader offers a prayer for the Holy Spirit's guidance in opening the hearts and minds of participants, that all who speak will do so in truth and love, and that all will listen deeply and attentively.
- ✦ A leader then invites a participant to introduce him or herself and to respond to an agreed upon question or two for a few minutes.
- ✦ Again, particular questions can be generated for each occasion of *Indaba*. Develop questions appropriate for your setting.
- ✦ Here are a couple of good, basic questions for *Indaba*:
 - ✦ What is God up to in your congregation or ministry setting that most excites you?
 - ✦ What are the greatest challenges faced by your congregation or ministry setting that may inhibit your engagement in God's mission for the sake of the world?
- ✦ The participant, having finished responding to the question(s), then invites another participant to respond to the questions.
- ✦ This process continues until all in the group have been invited to speak.
- ✦ If there is time, participants may engage in free conversation as a way of getting to know each other better and deepen relationships.
- ✦ A leader then closes the *Indaba* conversation, giving thanks to God for this holy encounter, and perhaps also inviting intercessions for each other, based on the joys and concerns shared.

Depending on the occasion and number of people in a group, an *Indaba* session can last a few minutes, or up to an hour or hour and a half. You can adapt the above stated format to your own needs and circumstances. Be creative!

Some concluding thoughts

Above all, trust that God is at work in healing and reconciling ways deepening our common life when the Holy Spirit draws us together to talk with one another. Remember again Jesus' promise! "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." (Matthew 18:20)



May God bless your experience of *Indaba*, of gathering for purposeful conversation, that our life together may be enriched by the privilege of knowing each other better, that our common witness to Christ may be enlivened and strengthened!

Take the *Indaba* Challenge: Let us know your best practices and creative adaptations of this conversational way of deepening relationships in the church that we may learn better how to be together in ongoing dialogue as Jesus would have it. Your sharing may also inspire others to practice *Indaba*. In this way, seeds planted can grow to full blossom! Share your *Indaba* experiences: jlinman@mnys.org.



Indaba support: Should you desire more information and further conversation about how to engage *Indaba*, don't hesitate to contact Pastor Jonathan Linman, Assistant to the Bishop for Faith and Leadership Formation in the Metropolitan New York Synod: 212-870-2374 and/or jlinman@mnys.org.

Portions of this document are adapted from website material of the Episcopal Diocese of New York which has used Indaba as a process for discerning their current plans for mission and for building relationships among partners in the Diocese.

Indaba is a part of "Growing Deeply in Faith: Five Years of God's Creative Grace!" During the next five program years, look for experiential and educational events, resources and initiatives that will highlight ways we can live more creatively and deeply into and out of the means of grace for our growth in faith for the mission we share. Mutual Conversation and Consolation is the first of these themes. For more information about this and our strategic plan, visit www.mnys.org.



Metropolitan New York Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.