A GUIDE FOR FINDING COMMON GROUND IN UNCOMMON TIMES
This season, many Minnesotans are eagerly planning holiday gatherings with friends and family. Given today’s political climate, some are feeling uncertain about how to have conversations with loved ones who view the world through a different lens.

Dean’s message of *Everyone’s Invited* reminds us to invite opportunities to have respectful, thoughtful dialogue with people who hold different opinions.
It’s helpful to think of these important conversations as a journey. You probably won’t reach the destination right away—just start down the path together. When starting any journey, it is helpful to have some tools to know what to expect, how to take the best route, and ways to navigate rough spots. Use the tips on these cards to get off on the right foot!
Let’s get started . . .
Review the cards

Review the guidelines on these cards before starting. This will help fortify your confidence and remind you of both the specific tips and your goal of building genuine dialogue.
For your first conversation, start with a friend or family member you believe is most open to listening.
Choose a good time and place

Find a one-on-one opportunity to talk when there aren’t distractions by kids or meal preparation or something else. The crowded dinner table is probably not the best place to start.
When having a conversation, keep these principles in mind:

- Practice respectful, active listening.
- Be a sympathetic ear.
- Find common ground.
- Assume good intentions.
- Be kind.
Just open the door

Make it your goal that the conversation goes well, not that you win them over immediately. It would be awesome if that happened, but the core goal is to begin a dialogue. This will help ensure that your family member or friend will stay genuinely open over time.
If you are on edge or have had a stressful day, pause and consider before beginning. More than anything, you need to feel calm and open to listening to your friend or family member—just like you’re asking them to be calm and listen to you.
Start slowly and be real

Talk about your life and what matters to you. Look for areas of agreement that you can build on—keep your conversation personal and give examples from your own life.
SAMPLE CONVERSATION OPENER

“There’s something I want to talk to you about, and I’m a little uncomfortable. But you’re important to me, so I want to talk to you about something that really matters to me.”
When debating, people typically put up guards and stop listening. Remember: These conversations are not meant to put people on the defensive, but rather to help them understand and share.

Avoid harsh debate.
Use examples of ways that you have changed your mind about something in the past that was difficult for you to understand or “get.” This also keeps you in touch by remembering that it was hard for you to change your opinion or feelings about something.
“I could feel myself wanting to just convince Brad and LouAnne right away, to just ‘get it.’ But I reminded myself that this was just the first conversation, and they were really important to me—so I held back. A couple of weeks later, we talked again, and they asked questions. I could tell they had really been thinking about it—and I realized that we had started the journey.”
Use language that invites openness and may even acknowledge that dialogue may feel awkward or uncomfortable.
SAMPLES OF CONNECTING LANGUAGE

“Which issues matter most to you?”

“How do you see it?”

“This can be a difficult issue.”

“Help me understand your point of view.”
Check in as you go.

Check in with yourself as you go. If you are starting to get revved up, take slow and deep breaths. If you are too worked up, it might be time to shift the conversation. Remember, in most cases, these conversations are more like marathons—not sprints.
Thank them for the conversation, regardless of the outcome. Once again: The goal is to start the dialogue with a long-term goal of opening hearts and minds. People keep thinking, even when we aren’t with them. We want them to think positively about the conversation.
After your conversation . . .
Take time to reflect on how it went and how you feel. What worked well and what do you wish you handled differently? Is the door open to continue the dialogue in the future?
Share with others

Share your experience with others who are also having these kinds of conversations, so you can compare notes and look for ways to continue building your confidence and skills. Invite friends to have difficult conversations of their own.
We want to know how your conversations are going, what works, and where you had glitches. Please take a moment and share your experience and ideas with us, so we can help others to have these important conversations, too.

Share at phillipsforcongress.org/commonground.
Now that you’ve taken time to reflect, commit to continuing the dialogue. Send a message expressing your thanks and extend an invitation to continue the conversation.
Congratulations! Taking steps to open important conversations and find common ground can take courage. Pause and appreciate your effort and commitment.