

2026: HOSTING A GATHERING TABLE



We may vote differently, think differently, even pray differently — but we cannot lose sight of one truth:

Every person deserves safety, dignity, and respect.

We gather not to erase differences, but to protect the ground on which we all stand.

By Charlotte Ranz

ISO: A COMMON GROUND



Conversations at The Gathering Table In Search of A Common Ground

OriginallyU.com

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WHAT IS ISO A Common Ground

We live in a time when neighbors are divided, trust is broken, and fear too often replaces understanding. [ISO \(In Search Of\) A Common Ground](#) is a space where we slow down, listen deeply, and search together for what still unites us.

Here, we dare to have hard conversations, not to erase our differences, but to protect what is sacred — human dignity, respect, and the right to feel safe in our homes, neighborhoods, and country.

At [ISO A Common Ground](#), every person's voice matters. Every person belongs at the table.

The North Star Statement

We are here to restore the ground we all stand on.

We commit to treat one another with dignity and respect.

We expect this from our leaders and from each other.

We will search for common ground without giving up our integrity.

We will name what cannot be compromised: the right to safety, the right to be heard, the right to live free from harm.

This is our shared work. This is our shared hope.

Welcome to ISO A Common Ground

Conversations at The Gathering Table

“We are here to restore the ground we all stand on.”

Suggested Opening Words (Host):

- Brief description of ISO and who we are (info provided in this packet which you may want to have copies made and available as handouts).
- Read the North Star statement aloud.
- Invite each person to share why they came.

Conversation Focus:

- ☐ Understanding Each Other
- ☐ Bridging Differences
- ☐ Ethics & Integrity
- ☐ Hope for Our Community

Closing:

- One-word takeaway from each participant.
- Read final line of the North Star again:
“This is our shared work. This is our shared hope.”
- Invite them to come back and continue the search.



The Gathering Table: A Guide to Meaningful Conversations

Thank you for your interest in starting a Gathering Table. This toolkit will help guide you through the process of bringing people together for meaningful, respectful conversation. You don't need to be an expert—just someone who's willing to listen and invite others to do the same. Included in your package are the following materials to help you with everything from inviting guests, tips on running the gathering, guidance on what and how to discuss, follow-up suggestions, and more. Feel free to copy and share with those who come to the table or want to learn more.

*****IMPORTANT***** If you have any questions, please contact me at zna2212@gmail.com and in the Subject line please be sure to write HOST TGT.

Content: Preparation

- ☐ Sample Invitations (2)
- ☐ Review Materials
- ☐ “Preparing to Host” Tips
- ☐ Handout Flyer-“Power of the People...”: remember to add your contact info

Content: Execution

- ☐ Suggested Agenda/Structure of Gathering
- ☐ Conversation Dialogue Ideas/Prompts
- ☐ Sign-In, Sign-up, Host Template
- ☐ The Gathering Table logo

Preparing to Host

- Choose a space where people can sit comfortably in a circle or around a table.
- Decide how many people to invite; a group of 6 to 10 is ideal for meaningful conversation.
- Create, mail, phone, contact those you have invited. Remember to include RSVP
- Prepare light refreshments if you wish or keep things simple and informal.
- Print a few prompt cards or reflection questions (see examples under [CONVERSATION PROMPTS](#)) to help you guide the discussion.



Sample Invitation (1)

Date:

Hi [Name],

I'm gathering a few neighbors/friends to share a simple conversation around what connects us – as neighbors, relatives, friends, citizens - even when we disagree. We're calling it The Gathering Table. It's not about politics or debate—it's about listening and rediscovering our common humanity. Would you like to join us? If so, I'd like you to join me along with others like yourself who are not happy with the current state of affairs and equally confused as what to do next.

Warmly,

(include your contact, location and RSVP information)

NOTES:



Sample Invitation (2)

Date: [Insert Date]

Subject: Your Seat Is Waiting at The Gathering Table

Dear Neighbor/Friend,

I'm gathering a small group of individuals I deeply respect — people of insight, experience, steady temperament, and the ability to listen even when they disagree. I believe you belong in that circle. We're calling it *The Gathering Table*.

Please mark your calendar for **[Date & Timeframe]** at **[Location]**.

This is a conversation — a real conversation. You bring the rare combination of strong convictions and a willingness to hear others who may see things differently. That's exactly what this moment requires.

We all sense it: the nation is at a crossroads. Healing won't come from the top down. It never has. Real change in this country has always started with citizens coming together, sharing stories, voicing concerns, and showing those in power what truly matters. We intend to do the same.

Let's be clear:

We will not be pitted against each other.

We will not allow dissent to be punished.

We will not forget that in a democracy, the government answers to the people — not the other way around.

This is just the beginning. The conversations ahead won't be easy, but they will be honest, respectful, and necessary. If you're willing to sit down and engage — not just speak but also listen — your voice will be invaluable.

Your seat is waiting at The Gathering Table.

I hope you'll claim it.

Warmly,

[Your Name]

Please RSVP by **[RSVP Deadline]**

[Email / Phone / Address]



THE POWER OF THE PEOPLE IS GREATER THAN THE PEOPLE IN POWER

Fear is the precondition to courage. Yes — you’re angry. Maybe scared. Definitely worried. No matter how you last voted, chances are this isn’t the outcome you expected. But here we are. And now? You might be thinking:

- *“What could possibly come next?”*
- *“It’s not that bad — the media’s just stirring it up.”*
- *“They’re all idiots. I’m done with politics.”*
- *“We need to get out of here.”*
- *“Is there more ice cream? More wine? Something to numb this?”*

Here’s the truth:

This moment can either eat you alive — or it can become fuel for something bigger. Real change has never started in Washington, D.C. It starts in living rooms, in church basements, in coffee shops — with Americans saying:

*“I’m not okay with what’s happening. I will not sit back in silence.
This is a moral moment in our country’s story.”*

The world is watching us. Not red states or blue states.
They’re watching a country that once inspired hope... now turning on itself.

What happened to that shining light on the hill?
To the people who led with compassion and strength — not intimidation?
To neighbors who disagreed, but still stood together?

If there’s going to be change, **it must come from us** — the people.

It’s time to set aside pride, ego, bitterness.
It’s time to stop waving red flags or blue ones.
It’s time to stitch the red, the white, and the blue back together — stars, stripes, and all. It’s time to listen.
Even when it’s hard.
Even when someone else’s truth feels foreign to our own. This is how we begin again. Your seat is waiting at The Gathering Table.
Let’s talk. Let’s listen. Let’s rebuild.

[Your contact information: Name, email, phone#]



Suggested Agenda Structure of a Gathering Table

Before you get started, be sure to have all attendees sign in with their names and a means for contacting them.

You will want to maintain this list to use as follow-up for notifying them of future gatherings and other information of interest.

1. Go around the circle and let each person introduce themselves and share why they came. Hopefully you will have invited people with opposing points of view. Everyone needs to be reminded truth can have many views.
 2. Share a conversation prompt (see examples below and next page) to start conversation.
 3. Encourage respectful, uninterrupted listening. No one is required to speak.
 4. Close with a reflection round—ask what participants heard today that stayed with them.
 5. Thank everyone for showing up and being present.
 6. Encourage folks to sign up for more Gathering Tables with you (sample form at end of package) and/or creating their own.
 7. I would appreciate receiving feedback about your meeting(s), attendance, topics of discussion, suggestions for changes/additions/deletions, etc. Then I can create pieces more helpful for each of your teams as they grow.
 8. You might want to take advantage of the extra NOTES page that is included at the end of this packet for yourself or to have printed and available for attendees to use.
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9. Also take a look at the “Celebrating Small Wins” form also in the back. Since we are trying to change attitudes from finger-pointing and yelling, to listening and even compromising, this might be a fun way to see at some point when your group feels ready for them to take a week and see what positive things they can do to protect our democracy and then share lists. It may even become newsworthy and you can share with local media!



Host: You may find little or no need for getting acquainted prompts. And on the other hand, you may find the topics under MORE PROMPTS could be single topics for the next 4 gatherings.

Conversation Prompts

1. Possible Initial Conversation Prompts

- What's something that gives you hope right now?
- Share a moment when you felt truly heard.
- What does community mean to you?
- What do you long for that seems missing in today's world?
- How do we hold space for people who see things differently?

This is just a beginning. There are no perfect words, no perfect plans—just your willingness to show up and listen. That's how the threads of community are rewoven, one table at a time.

2. More Conversation Prompts

a. Understanding Each Other

- When have you felt misunderstood about something that mattered deeply to you?
- What helps you feel heard, even when someone disagrees with you?
- Share a time when you listened to someone you disagreed with and came away with new understanding.

b. Bridging Differences

- What's one belief or value you hold strongly — and how do you share it without judging others?
- What is one small thing neighbors could do to make this community feel more respectful?
- How do you decide when to speak up and when to simply listen?

c. Ethics & Integrity

- How do you stay true to your ethics when facing pressure to “take sides”?
- What does respectful disagreement look like to you?
- How can we hold people (or ourselves) accountable without shaming or excluding them?

d. Hope for Our Community

- What gives you hope that we can find common ground?
- If we could model one value for the next generation, what should it be?
- What small step could we take after today to build trust in our neighborhood?



CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. Grounding + Why We're Here (5–7 min)

Open with something like:

“Look, I know most of us here are doers. You all have jobs, commitments, values, and probably strong opinions. Me too.

And if we’re honest—we’re also tired. Angry. Confused. Some of us are losing hope. Some of us are *ready to fight*.

The truth is—we’re showing up in the same neighborhood with different truths and we’re not helping each other.

So I’m proposing a pause—not to avoid the issues—but to slow down enough that we don’t lose *each other* in the middle of them.”

Then add a touch of humor:

“And don’t worry—we’re not joining hands and singing. We’re just going to try this ancient, radical act... called **listening**.”

2. Acknowledge the Fire (Real Talk Prompt)

Instead of a soft question, try this:

“Let’s go around and answer this:

What’s one thing you’ve felt lately about the state of our country—or your neighborhood—that’s made you want to scream, cry, or check out completely?

And then—what’s one thing that’s kept you *from* giving up?”

They’ll relate. They’ll laugh. Some will sigh.

You’re creating shared emotional ground before shared ideology.



3. Move Into “What’s Breaking Down?” (Not “What Do You Believe?”)

Prompt the group:

“Where do you see breakdown in how we talk to each other today?
Where’s the moment the conversation stops being productive?”

If folks get political or heated, bring it back to communication:

“Let’s not fix the world right now—let’s just name where the wheels fall off in our conversations.”

✨ 4. What Would *Better* Feel Like?

When you feel your group is ready for this:

“If we could change one thing about the way people speak to each other—what would it be?”
“What would it feel like to be heard, not just agreed with?”

🪶 5. Closing – Light But Real

“We won’t solve democracy today/tonight, but maybe we can remember we’re not enemies.
Maybe next time we disagree, we’ll pause long enough to breathe—before we post, or react, or walk away.”

“So what are you leaving with—one word, or one idea?”

“What’s Next” Plan

This doesn’t have to be dramatic. It just needs to feel:

- **Doable**
- **Meaningful**
- **Voluntary** (not everyone is ready, and that’s okay)

Here’s a 3-part **post-gathering plan** you can offer at the end of the first meeting:

1. Reflect + Repeat (Soft Follow-Up)

“If tonight made you think differently—or made you want to show up again—let’s do this again. Different topic. Same table. More listening. More honesty.”

- Ask for volunteers to help co-host or co-invite
- Create a simple RSVP sheet for those interested
- This gives continuity *without pressure*.

2. Micro-Actions You Can Take

Offer 2–3 options they can choose from based on comfort:

- **The 3-Conversation Challenge:**
“Have one deeper conversation with someone you disagree with this month. Just to listen—not debate.”
- **The Language Awareness Practice:**
“Watch for when your words escalate instead of connect. Can you pause, reframe, or ask a question instead?”
- **The Common Ground Exercise:**
“Ask someone in your life, ‘What value matters most to you—and why?’”
These are **subtle, powerful civic actions**—done person-to-person, not through hashtags or headlines.



3. Join the Circle (Ongoing Community)

“I’m starting a very small email circle for folks who want to stay connected—whether it’s for future tables, resources, or just encouragement in this messy moment.”

Let them sign up **by choice**, not obligation.

This gives you a **core group** to grow from organically—and signals that this is becoming a *movement*, not just a meeting.

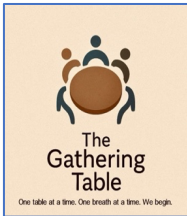
So Your Final Words Might Sound Like:

“We didn’t fix everything tonight. We weren’t supposed to.
But we practiced something that could actually make change possible: staying present.

If this spoke to you, take one of the micro-actions. Tell someone what you heard. Show up next time.

That’s how this grows—one honest table at a time.”





Conversations Around The Gathering Table

YES! I WANT TO BE MORE INVOLVED!

1. Add “x” in TODAY column for attending.
2. Add “x” in FUTURE column if you want to be notified of future gatherings.
3. Add “x” in HOST column if you want to host

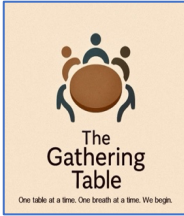
PRINT YOUR NAME+ PHONE #	EMAIL	TODAY	FUTURE	HOST (X if yes)

HOSTING YOUR OWN GATHERING TABLE

PRINT YOUR NAME+ PHONE #	EMAIL	TODAY	FUTURE	HOST (X if yes)

HOSTING YOUR OWN GATHERING TABLE

PRINT YOUR NAME+ PHONE #	EMAIL	TODAY	FUTURE	HOST (X if yes)



Items to copy for yourself and/or your members/visitors

ISO A COMMON GROUND

The North Star Statement

We are here to restore the ground we all stand on.

We commit to treat one another with dignity and respect.

We expect this from our leaders and from each other.

We will search for common ground without giving up our integrity.

We will name what cannot be compromised: the right to safety, the right to be heard, the right to live free from harm.

This is our shared work. This is our shared hope.

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MY NOTES

LET'S START CELEBRATING SMALL WINS

Every small win is progress. Noticing and celebrating them builds momentum, boosts confidence, and keeps me moving forward.

JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUN JUL AUG SEP OCT NOV DEC

Monday

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Tuesday

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Thursday

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Friday

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Saturday

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Things I'm grateful for

