



SACRED SEASON OF VOTING

A Voter Action Toolkit by the
Faithful Democracy Campaign for the
2020 General Election



The 2020 Sacred Season of Voting

Background:

This year COVID-19 will lead many people to vote early-in-person or vote-by-mail (also known as absentee voting). These special circumstances call for mass voter education and mobilization efforts to amplify the importance of voting early.

Accordingly, Faithful Democracy invites you to participate in a multi-faith voter action campaign from Thursday, October 1st through the election. Each week, a simple toolkit is posted with strategic faith messaging, social media, and reflections grounded in key religious markers to communicate the significance of this season of voting to people of faith.

“As trusted messengers, faith leaders have the unique opportunity to mobilize, educate, register, protect and inspire communities to vote in the 2020 election.”

- [Faithful Voter Toolkit](#), Faith in Public Life

All three Abrahamic traditions and other major world religions incorporate seasonal celebrations, observed holy days and other markers for times of special importance to the faithful. Communally moving through these events with focused intentions serves to deepen faith and solidarity among believers. Collective observances help communities of faith maintain cohesion, fortify collective memory, and provide grounding in a greater power at work. Faithful Democracy and our multi-faith partners bring this familiar practice to bear for the 2020 general election.

The Sacred Season of Voting is meant to be a resource to ground voters in faith during a turbulent, anxious time and to energize people of faith around the power of the vote in this extended 2020 election season. Our accompanying toolkit aims to help voters take the necessary steps to ensure they cast their ballots safely and successfully while avoiding the common pitfalls seen in some 2020 primary elections. The Sacred Season of Voting moves us through the difficult weeks leading up to November 3rd and prepares us for the potential uncertainty as results are certified.

Each week we will pull from themes of holy celebrations observed by our multi-faith partners, including: Sukkot, the Feast of St. Francis and St. Luke, Mawlid al-Nabi al-Sharif, Navaratri, and the Feast of All Saints. Weekly reflections grounded in the religious holy days are combined with messaging around key election benchmarks, online resources and helpful tips that can be shared on social media.

In a secular democracy, participating in the political process through voting is a similarly sacred, communal, and familiar experience. We hope that by tying sacred themes to this period of voting, we can mobilize more voters of faith into action. We encourage participation and use of this campaign in whatever way is most helpful. Let us know how you'll use the Sacred Season of Voting: [\[link\]](#)

Faith Messaging:

This first week of the Sacred Season of Voting looks to our Jewish sisters and brothers' celebration of Sukkot and to the Feast of St. Francis in our Christian tradition for inspiration.



Sukkot, a Hebrew word meaning "booths" or "huts," is a sacred time for the Jewish people to give thanks for the fall harvest and to commemorate the 40 years of the Jewish people wandering in the desert. During the seven-day festival, Jewish people are commanded to rejoice and construct a fragile dwelling or "sukkah" to use to celebrate, eat, sleep, and commemorate the struggle of their ancestors. These temporary booths harken to the hardships of wandering through the desert in the Book of Exodus, slowly making their way towards a Promised Land. For many modern Jews, building "sukkot" (in this case, the plural of *sukkah*), have open walls and open doors, to create a welcoming space for others needing hospitality on their own journeys.

As faithful citizens of the United States, now is a time to remember and to appreciate our own history of struggle, hardship, and violence over our nearly 250 year journey to creating a more perfect union. The adversities experienced by our own forbearers who courageously fought for equal voting rights brings us to this critical point in our history. We reflect upon the inhospitable period in our history when the women and the people of color that came before us were not considered worthy of the vote. Our call now, as people of faith is to maintain the fragile spaciousness of the voting booth—to ensure that all eligible voters are welcomed and that their right to vote is protected. We also reflect this week on the 'ushpizin" (sacred guests) in our sukkah to honor heroes of voting rights like the late John Lewis and Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg, whose lives were devoted to securing the right to vote for all citizens.

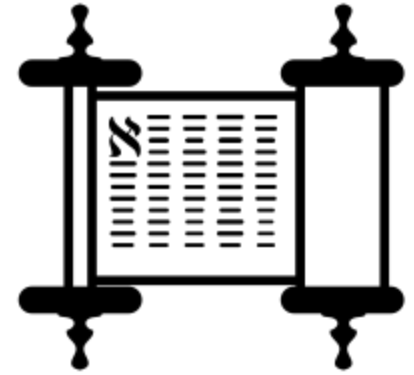
Many Christians observe the Feast of St Francis of Assisi on October 4th. This feast celebrates the 12th Century life of St Francis, who was revered for his deep concern for those on the margins and for his care of God's creation. The current Pope of the Catholic Church took the name of this saint as a bold statement about the kind of leadership he would bring to the Church. This week we are reminded that, even as leaders who are beacons of light pass away, their legacies of truth persevere. The values of care, of inclusion, of concern for others are timeless. Our call is to recognize these values in those we support as leaders. We are a blessed nation in that our democracy allows us to discern and to choose our leadership—who we elect matters.



Faith Messaging:

This second week of the Sacred Season we return to our Jewish sisters and brothers for inspiration with the culmination of Sukkot and the celebration of Simchat Torah.

Sukkot harkens back to the adversity faced by the Israelites, freed from slavery yet journeying through wilderness towards a promised land. The temporary nature of the Jewish *sukkah*, or booth, elicits an awareness of the fragility of life. At the same time, the openness and hospitality of the *sukkah* inspires a sense of shared abundance. When we apply this wisdom to our democracy, we can rejoice in the right to vote and how it has been expanded over our nation's history. We are also humbled by the fragility of access to the ballot in 2020. In the spirit of **Sukkot**, we are called to hold both truths as we take extra care to make sure that our vote is successfully cast and that we help others exercise their right to vote.



Simchat Torah—meaning “Rejoice in the Torah”—is a Jewish holiday celebrated to mark the conclusion of the annual cycle of public Torah readings. Jewish people of faith rejoice in having made it through the cycle in order to begin again with the anticipation of moving into a new cycle with fresh eyes and renewed devotion to key tenets of their faith. The transition is commemorated by ceremonial readings from the sacred scrolls of the Torah. The ending of the cycle concludes with Deuteronomy's death of Moses after his farewell blessing to the 12 Tribes of Israel as they embark on the final stretch into the Promised Land. According to Jewish custom, a new beginning must immediately follow a completion so on **Simchat Torah**, that reading is followed by Genesis 1, to represent the new start.

During **Simchat Torah**, many congregations call up all eligible members for an *Aliyah*—to read parts from the Torah in a communal, participatory process. The celebration often includes songs about the goodness of the law, the generosity of God, Messianic yearnings, and prayers for the restoration of the House of David and the Temple in Jerusalem. In the 20th century, **Simchat Torah** came to symbolize the public assertion of Jewish identity; dancing with the Torah is a common part of this ritual in many Jewish congregations.

In our secular democracy, the U.S. is also embarking on a significant transitional moment between cycles which we mark with an election. The election season provides a time for the American people to reflect upon the last four years, to celebrate having made it through and to set out to begin again with fresh eyes. Now is the time to take account of how our norms, institutions, laws and public systems have been employed by our leaders during this last cycle. ***What priorities has our leadership reflected in the last four years? Have they lived up to the ideals and tenets of our founding documents? Have they served to strengthen and unite us as a people?***

The call to form a more perfect union is an ongoing, iterative process—progress is made with each cycle of leadership along with bottoms-up civic movements. This election challenges people of faith to discern our individual and collective response to the last four years. This is also an opportunity to assess our own engagement as faithful citizens during this time—the Bill of Rights assigns a civic duty to each of us to be

hands-on in this democracy. ***Has our participation reflected a commitment to a compassionate, just, and liberating God as the compass for our engagement?***

And so we celebrate this opportunity to make our voices heard through our vote. We rejoice in our remarkably intact history of peaceful transfers of power with each ending of a cycle. Our insistence on a free and fair election in which the outcome reflects the will of the people is our public assertion of the truth and the strength of the founders' vision. The 2020 election will be a transition made of the people, for the people and by the people who are casting their ballots in anticipation of entering a new cycle with fresh eyes. Vote early and make sure your vote is counted.

Faith Messaging:

We are well into the Sacred Season of Voting when nearly [10 million](#) Americans have already cast their ballots in the general election! This third week we look to our Christian and Hindu sisters and brothers in faith for inspiration with the Feast of Saint Luke and the beginning of Navratri, the Hindu Festival of Nine Nights.

The Feast of Saint Luke is Sunday the 18th on the Christian liturgical calendar in remembrance of one of the four authors of the New Testament Gospels. St. Luke was an Evangelist, the writer of the third Gospel, and is the patron saint of physicians, artists, and students. Luke was a doctor and early disciple who traveled with St. Paul. He was known as the “beloved physician” (Colossians 4:14).

In Christian Scripture, each Gospel of the New Testament is a different telling of the life, ministry, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ—the central story of Christian faith. Taken together, the Gospels convey the truth of the Good News of salvation for Christian believers. While they generally tell the same story, each has its own lens and can vary significantly in places. Luke contextualizes his telling to consider God’s overall historical purpose and the place of the church within it. Luke’s Gospel also helps us gain a deeper appreciation of the compassion Jesus feels for others, particularly the “little people” prominently featured in his account. Luke is also the author of the *Acts of the Apostles*, an important book of the New Testament which follows the Apostles after Jesus and the origins of the Church in early communities. What wisdom can we glean from St. Luke in reflecting on this election?



We know that the ravages of COVID 19 continue to require the tireless efforts of frontline physicians and healthcare providers even into this election season. Many voting protocols have changed to allow voters to avoid unnecessary exposure to the virus. Vulnerability to or fear of COVID should not deter American voters from exercising the right to cast their ballot. Voting early or by mail are the best ways to help socially distance voters and minimize exposure at crowded polls on Election Day. There are still many options and ample time to vote early in whatever way accommodates your health concerns so make a plan and vote.

St. Luke reminds us that the entirety of truth is never held by only one storyteller. Christians hold all of the Gospels as equally true—even where they differ or seem to conflict. Taken together they provide a more nuanced and rich understanding of the complex truth of our faith. This Sacred Season is a time to reflect on the truth of our nation. It has been a beacon of freedom to the world, with 250 years of advancement towards a more equitable, inclusive democracy where all citizens have the right to vote. It was also founded on a system of slavery which even today perpetrates systemic injustices and disenfranchisement onto communities of color, Native peoples and other marginalized populations. In 2020 Americans are called to confront the complex truth of our development and our shortfalls as a nation. Insisting that every vote counts—and that every vote is counted—is a testament to the deeper truth of our ideals.

As St. Luke knew, context helps us make sense of a story. It is all too easy to be consumed by the confusing, disconcerting barrage of warnings about this election. To be sure, there are unprecedented challenges, but it is also true that the 2020 election is only the latest test in the grand experiment in American democracy. In fact, a century ago we successfully held elections during a deadly contagious pandemic. We also managed to conduct an election in the middle of the Civil War! These challenges are not insurmountable, and in 2020 they are ours to overcome, thus paving the way for the next act in our national story.

Navratri - The Festival of Nine Nights begins on October 17th and is a significant Hindu festival. It is a nine day celebration of the triumph of good over evil, of light overcoming darkness. Large numbers of Hindu believers across the globe pray for good health, prosperity, purity of mind, love, and peace during this time—prayers for us to amplify during this Sacred Season of Voting in the U.S.

In this election, the struggle between light and dark should not be framed as a partisan battle. For people of faith, we hope for an election that is transparent, clear, open, and safe followed by a nonviolent and methodical counting of the votes to determine the outcome. However, forces from within and outside of our government are using debunked narratives and disinformation to sow chaos, fear and confusion among the electorate. These same forces push voter suppression and intimidation tactics to taint the election outcome. Next week's reflection will delve more into the wisdom that **Navratri** can offer for our own will to prevail in having a free, safe, fair and peaceful election.



Faith Messaging:

We begin this fourth week of the Sacred Season of Voting celebrating nearly [30 million](#) votes cast. We join our Hindu friends in reflecting on Navratri, the Festival of Nine nights, which marks a most auspicious moment in the lunar calendar according to Hinduism.

Navratri is a commemoration of action and agency in the face of conflict, and celebrates the conquest of divine power to preserve and protect love, virtue, prosperity and knowledge in the world. The Goddess Durga brings the positive force of feminine energy into battle to protect and safeguard her devotees against the negative forces of evil and wickedness.¹

The nine day festival is celebrated with fervor and festivity in Hindu communities the world over, with each day dedicated to the nine divine forms of the Goddess Durga. Her nine forms vary significantly in the power they manifest: ranging from a fierce black goddess valiantly prepared for battle to a healing, sustaining mother figure that nurtures creative power. With her variety of divine forms, the Goddess Durga displays “the vulnerability of a mother who can turn into a storm cloud when the need arises to protect her child”.²

The festival provides Hindu believers rich opportunities to reflect on the Goddess Durga and her battle with the demon Mahishasura, a symbol of egotism whom she ultimately annihilates.³ This victory protects humanity from evil and misery by destroying our negative energy and vices like arrogance, jealousy, prejudice, hatred, anger, greed and selfishness.

Many Hindu communities have particular devotions associated with their prayers and offerings for each day. Prayer for the longevity of family members gives way to prayer for improved intellect and decision-making ability. Prayer for safety from unnatural events moves into prayer for peace, tranquility and prosperity in life.

As the Sacred Season of Voting progresses, this Hindu celebration gives us much to consider in reflecting on how our actions and agency as faithful citizens can support goodness in these times. Feminine and protective energy, represented by the divine light, is an apt force to contend with evils like disinformation campaigns and sinister plots to turn humanity against itself.

To be sure, forces inside and outside our institutions are working to undermine the vote and foment chaos, confusion and discord among the people. There are forces at work trying to diminish and suppress the voice of a discerning people. They sow doubt, amplify cynicism, and deny our humanity to pit us against one another. A relentless drive for power in this election is amplifying misogyny and racism,

¹<https://www.google.com/url?q=https://indiacurrents.com/what-does-goddess-durga-symbolize/&sa=D&ust=1603137914211000&usg=AOvVaw3ecYZ57QaYKY-uinmbqGFP>

²<https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.indiatoday.in/lifestyle/culture/story/what-is-navratri-festivities-hinduism-hindu-festival-maa-durga-puja-indian-goddess-1049219-2017-09-21&sa=D&ust=1603137914211000&usg=AOvVaw0g2vWpXtoFymTRFeV6fz7r>

³<https://www.google.com/url?q=https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/events/happy-navratri-2019-images-wishes-messahes-cards-greetings-quotes-status-pictures-gifs-and-wallpapers/articleshow/71349202.cms&sa=D&ust=1603137914216000&usg=AOvVaw13EHaOg9PM75MH-2cZveRA>

false narratives of fraud and threats of violence. All who care about our democracy should be alarmed and ready to defend it by combating these efforts.

The multifaceted representations of agency and resistance celebrated during **Navratri** can provide inspiration in this election. National and local campaigns offer an array of options for each person to find the right way to engage on the side of goodness within the current context:

- Monitoring at or near polling places to ensure no voters are being intimidated;
- Providing food, water and other accommodations at polling places to nurture voters in long lines;
- Supporting voters to successfully cast their ballots as poll-workers;
- Voicing insistence that all votes are counted;
- Combating misinformation by flagging and reporting it;
- Praying for the well-being of voters, election officials, and all people working for a safe, fair election;
- Bringing nonviolent resistance in the public square in protest, if necessary.

The Goddess Durga brought several manifestations to bear in defeating Mahishasura in battle. During this fourth week of the Sacred Season, **Navratri** encourages people of faith to consider what is ours to do to meet this moment as steadfast, courageous citizens. **How will we be faithful to the truth of a democracy where votes determine leadership and where peacemakers occupy the public square? How will we use our agency to resist a politics of division and fear?**

Since our founding as a slave-holding nation, Black Americans have engaged in every form of resistance possible to prove and exert their humanity and their entitlement to equal rights in the law. In 2020 we are called to follow the leadership of civil rights partners and communities of color with their deep historical wisdom in overcoming oppression and combating violence. Their grace in adversity teaches us that maintaining personal and collective joy and celebration in the face of threat and division is its own powerful form of resistance.