

FALL
2016

Families

WEAVE A TAPESTRY OF FAITH

STORY FOR ALL AGES



**A Vote:
A Way
to Have
a Say**

Leader of the Birds

When the world was new, Eagle called a meeting of all the birds. One beautiful morning, they assembled: Flamingo, Steppe Buzzard, Warbler, and all the others. With hooting and singing they greeted one another.

Eagle called for silence: "We must choose a leader!" There were caws and whistles of agreement. Then Eagle said, "I look and act powerful. I am the best choice!"

Then, Owl spoke. "Yes, you are majestic. But I should be the leader. I am known for my wisdom."

The birds began to argue back and forth. Should their leader have wisdom like Owl or majesty like Eagle? Or perhaps strength, like Steppe Buzzard, or a stunning set of tail feathers, like Peacock? Then, a tiny voice emerged. It

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was Warbler: "I think you should elect me leader of the birds!"

The birds began to laugh. How dare this ridiculous little bird even suggest such a thing! "What have you got to offer? You are not the wisest, nor the strongest, nor the most majestic of the birds, or even the most popular," said Eagle.

"Well," said Warbler, "I can be a good leader. I want the opportunity to try!"

"Let's have a contest!" declared Eagle, and every bird agreed. "We'll all fly as high as we can go. Whoever flies highest will be our new leader."

Warbler, who lacked the strength for high flying, made a plan. Just before the contest, Warbler crept under Eagle's wing, pushing deep into Eagle's feathers. Eagle, determined to win, did not feel Warbler at all.

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The Families pages are adapted from Tapestry of Faith lifespan faith development programs.

www.uua.org/tapestryoffaith

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The birds flew, higher and higher. Those with small wings soon turned back. In time, only three birds remained: Eagle, Owl, and Steppe Buzzard. Although exhausted, they pushed on. When Owl could no longer continue, Owl dove back toward earth. Up and up flew Eagle and Steppe Buzzard, until at long last Eagle saw that Steppe Buzzard was not able to continue. Eagle flew just a little higher and proudly cried, "I've won! I am the new Leader of the Birds!"

"Not so fast," chirped Warbler, who emerged from Eagle's feathers. "You have not won yet!" And Warbler rose above Eagle, who had no strength left.

The birds did not accept Warbler as their leader. The trickery angered them. Frightened, Warbler flew deep into the forest. Today, Warbler flits from place to place, never staying long enough to be caught, calling "I can lead! I can lead!"

And to this day the birds are still undecided about who should be their leader.

Versions of this tale appear in many cultures' folklore. This version, adapted from one by Loreen McDonald, a teacher in South Africa, appears in *Stories in Faith*, a Tapestry of Faith Toolkit book.



"I believe...that those who are affected by policy—not those who by default often stand above it—should be heard in the debate."

Winona LaDuke, Native American activist, accepting a nomination to run for Vice President of the U.S. in 1996

EXPLORING TOGETHER

There's a Presidential election coming! U.S. voters will choose our next leader and elect mayors, governors, and other officials to lead our local communities and represent us in Congress. Election season is an exciting time to participate in our democracy.

What kind of leader do you want our country to have? Get into the conversation!



What Makes a Leader?

In the story, the birds agreed that being able to fly the highest was a good test for their leader. What does it take to lead a family, an orchestra, or a construction crew? How about our nation?

Go around in a circle taking turns to name one quality a leader ought to have. The qualities from the story can get you started. But keep going. Should a leader be kind? Strict? Remember, great leaders sometimes play the role of gently supporting others.

wisdom funny smart wise patient
strength kindness courageous majesty

Your Turn to Vote

In our democracy, children get chances to vote at a young age. You have probably voted for your favorite snack, which movie your family will watch, or a recess activity at school. Have you ever voted for a leader? A class representative, or a captain for your dance, chess, or sports team? How did you make your decision?



Leaders Among Us

Tape a sheet of paper on everyone's back and hand out washable markers. Invite everyone to think of one positive quality for each other person and write it on their back. Now, read aloud the qualities others see in you! When others recognize that we are brave, or funny, or patient, that feels good. And it helps us understand the special sort of leadership we bring to the group.



Our Choosing Day! Who's Choosing?

Walt Whitman's poem, "Election Day, November, 1884," portrays our national "choosing day" as a beautiful, wonderful tradition. You can look up the poem online.

But in 1884, only men were allowed to vote. African American men had gained the right to vote 14 years earlier, but, in many states, white men used intimidation and restrictions to keep black voting to a minimum.

Over time, more of us became voters, because we fought for the right. Our faith heritage includes many fighters who believed in democracy and our right to have a say in matters that concern

Did you know...
Women were not allowed to vote for President until 1920.

us: Lydia Maria Child, Susan B. Anthony, James Reeb, John L. Cashin, and others.

Go online to find out who can vote for President this year. What about people born in another country who do not have U.S. citizenship? What about someone who has served time in prison? Some people will not vote because their state's laws make it too difficult, for example, by demanding that everyone bring a photo ID card to vote.

On the other hand, some cities and states are using the Internet to make voting more accessible and fair. And many Unitarian Universalists are still fighting to include all of us in our "choosing day!"



Your vote is your own, private, independent choice!

Courtesy of the National Constitution Center.

The 5th Unitarian Universalist Principle
We believe all persons should have a vote about the things that concern them.

It's Right to Vote

You'd think everyone with the right to vote would use their right, right? Wrong. Fewer than 2/3 of those eligible actually voted in national elections.

When asked why they don't vote, some people say:

My vote won't make a difference.



I am too busy.



I don't like any of the candidates.



What do you think of these reasons? What could you say to help someone change their mind and GO VOTE?



Many Ways to Play the Leadership Game

What does a leader do? When should leaders share the role, or take turns? Play a "leader" game while you think about these questions!

Amoeba Tag. To start, one person is "It." When you get tagged, hang onto the "It" who tagged you and go on to tag more people together.

Frozen Tag. "It" can freeze people, while other players can unfreeze. Who would you say is the leader?

Capture the Flag. Make two teams. Each team tries to protect their own flag while trying to get the other team's. There's room for many leaders. Can you move quickly and quietly? Share that gift with your team.

Follow the Leader. When you lead, try different styles and observe what happens. If you move in unexpected ways, is the game more fun? But, will everyone be able to keep up?

Democracy Is Messy. Take Your Kids to the Polls.



On an election day, Jay Leach votes early in the morning, taking his daughter Annie along. Later in the afternoon, his wife, Melissa Mummert, goes to the polls—and Annie goes again. Annie votes “early and often,” jokes her father. “Our precinct workers now know Annie.”

Annie has learned by example: Adults vote. Now that she is ten, her parents want her to know why we vote: because it is our right, our responsibility, and our privilege. Recently, Leach pointed out to his daughter that for many people, voting is “so boring they do not even do it. But, both of my grandmothers were born into a world where they could not vote! One reason we vote is to help secure that right and privilege for everyone.”

For Unitarian Universalists, to vote

is an act of faith. We believe that we deserve a say in matters that concern us. But, democracy is messy. When we vote, we do not always get our way. So, what is the point of voting?



Annie Leach and her father, Reverend Jay Leach, having a say at the State House in Raleigh, NC.

“In some ways, voting is a symbol,” Leach says. “It is just one action of many we take to participate, to demonstrate, to petition.” And so, Annie’s parents have also given her practice at “voting with her feet.” She has stood with Moral Monday protestors to protect voting rights and carried a marriage license down her congregation’s aisle as part of a just-legalized same-sex wedding.

“We need to be ready to have our say

in multiple ways, to continue our engagement in the common good after the ballots are finally counted,” says Leach. “That’s an approach to living our fifth Principle which we can teach our kids.”

■ **Talk with your child about who you will vote for, and why.**

■ **Help with voter registration. Go to a rally where your child can witness passionate citizens. Offer people rides to the polls.**

■ **Whether or not your candidate wins, when you peacefully demonstrate about issues that concern you, you’re teaching your children to have a say.**



Rev. Jay Leach and his wife, Rev. Melissa Mummert, serve the Unitarian Universalist Church of Charlotte, NC as, respectively, Senior Minister and Affiliated Community Minister.

FAMILIES: WEAVE A TAPESTRY OF FAITH

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FIND OUT MORE

■ See voter participation since 1789 (never more than 80%) on the U.S. Election Project website: <http://www.electproject.org/national-1789-present>

■ A new Beacon Press book by Mary Frances Berry, *Five Dollars and a Pork Chop Sandwich*, explores illegal voter manipulation and shares strategies for empowerment through voting. At inSpirit, the UU Book and Gift Shop.

■ Another story of birds seeking a leader is “The Journey of the Birds” in the Tapestry of Faith program, *Signs of Our Faith*. Inspired by a Sufi Muslim poem, this tale asks, “Does a strong leader make a community strong? Or is strength found in members’ willingness to work together and share their gifts?” Read it together. How does its message apply to the choices our nation faces today?