



# The CommUUnicator

Newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist  
Fellowship of Waynesboro

## Of Beauty and Invasion

This Tuesday I drove to the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Charlottesville, where I preached Sunday before last. The drive is a beautiful one – especially at this time of year. The redbuds and dogwoods are finished blooming until next year. The landscape is fully green. And now the mountains are decorated by the large pale purple blossom clusters of *Paulownia tomentosa* trees. Every year when they bloom, I am, by association, transported to Japan. Not the living Japan of my memories from my time in Okazaki, Aichi Prefecture, but the historic Japan of my studies.

I first found an emotive connection to paulownia blossoms in the eleventh-century *Tale of Genji*, a major work of fiction from the Heian Period in Japan, set in the imperial palace in Kyoto. The first section of *Genji* is “The Paulownia Pavilion,” the part of the palace complex where the emperor’s favorite but very low status wife lives. Intrigues and relationships in the royal court are presented in ways that evoke all the beauty and risk you could ask for. That commingling of beauty and risk comes forward into twenty-first-century Virginia in those roadside trees. *Paulownia tomentosa* are an invasive species in large areas of the Eastern



United States, including our own Blue Ridge Mountains.

Paulownias are native to China. Along with Buddhism, written language and Chinese characters, many artistic forms and traditions of court life, they were imported to Japan by a culture eager to compete and participate within their region. Chinese culture was an invasive species, of sorts, within ancient Japan, mingling inextricably with the Japanese culture of those early years. In the 1800s, the period of opening to the West and reestablishing the centrality of the imperial house, a late effort was made to separate things that were

understood to be original in Japan from all the Chinese stuff, even though the mixture was centuries old. It was a proverbial “fool’s errand” that was, nonetheless, taken seriously.

Similarly, in addition to all the accidental arrivals of invasive species in this country, plenty such risks arrived because Americans believed there would be some benefit to importing them to a new home. Think kudzu, which was intentionally brought to these shores in 1876 to fight agricultural erosion but grew so quickly that it became known as “the vine that ate the South.” When it is not out of control, paulownia is not only beautiful when it blooms, but also a quick-growing light-weight

timber tree. It's easy to understand why it was brought here. But in our setting, it spreads and is difficult to rein in – as in North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut where it is officially listed as "invasive." Cut down the tree and it simply comes back from the roots. Like other invasive species, it is difficult and costly to bring under control.

Those of us who greatly enjoy paulownia blossoms, and associate them with romantic notions of other times and places, might have difficulty seeing the harm these trees bring to our native species and long-standing natural landscapes. I am far from being expert concerning how to deal appropriately with invasive species around us, but the drive between Waynesboro and Charlottesville challenges me to learn more. And resources abound.

Peace and Blessings,  
Rev. Paul

### New Member Spotlight



Jane Ellen Teller is a long-time Unitarian Universalist and credits finding this faith as

instrumental in helping her through the life-altering experience of divorce. As a member of the UU congregation in Fredricksburg, she served in just about every volunteer position, including president, so she has lots of knowledge and experience to share with our Fellowship.

Jane Ellen married her husband, Hugh Teller, more than 25 years ago when she was a single mom of teenage children. They moved from Fredricksburg about five years ago to enable Hugh, a dentist, to practice his new dental specialty, temporomandibular joint (TMJ) disorders, in Charlottesville. They live in [Emerson Commons](#), a multi-generational co-housing community in Crozet.

Jane Ellen was born in Charlottesville and grew up in the Methodist Church. She has five grown children from her first marriage and six grandchildren, who all live in different parts of the country. She has been a stay-at-home mom, a high school history teacher, a health and wellness shop keeper, and for 20 years, an assistant in Hugh's dental office. Currently retired, she stays active with yoga, exercise, gardening and making pottery.

#### Atonement

The times when we feel helpless and alone,  
When we lack will or strength to set things right,  
When faith and even hope sink like a stone;  
When we see around us suffering and despair  
Beyond our meager efforts to repair,  
There's nothing left but love that can atone,  
Or give or take a hand in the darkest night.

Joe Good

