

GREENFIELD RECORDER

1,000 (paper) cranes to fly from Ashfield to Kentucky

By ZACK DeLUCA

Staff Writer

Published: 3/23/2021 4:39:17 PM

ASHFIELD – As part of an ongoing effort to connect with others and overcome political division, the First Congregational Church of Ashfield and several other hilltown churches are making 1,000 cranes which will be mailed to Letcher County in eastern Kentucky, the home of the group that is part of the “[Hands Across the Hills](#)” project.

[Hands Across the Hills](#) formed in response to the 2016 election with the goal of meeting face to face with others who voted differently. Two small groups, progressives in rural Western Massachusetts and conservative voters in Eastern Kentucky, met for three immersive weekends of dialogue and cultural exchange in each other’s towns, in fall 2017, spring 2018 and fall 2019. This dialogue still continues today, but over Zoom during the pandemic.

“The impetus for this undertaking was born in the hearts of two young people in our congregation,” said Rev. David Jones, minister of the First Congregational in Ashfield, of the crane project.



Rochelle Nahmias of Gill with paper cranes created by several hilltown churches for the Hands Across the Hills project. STAFF PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ» Buy this Image



Many of the 1,000 origami cranes created by several hilltown churches for the Hands Across the Hills project. STAFF PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ» Buy this Image

This effort has continued because of the church's relationship with Sarah Pirtle, a former staff member of our church, and a member of the Hands Across the Hills initiative. Jones said this project is providing a chance for children and adults to reach out during Holy Week with prayers of connection and love. In Japanese heritage, he said, folding a thousand paper cranes grants powerful good wishes. The Hands Across the Hills initiative was the subject of a CBS segment in February, which can be viewed at <https://bit.ly/3143RBZ>.

“When the young people at our church said they wanted to make 1,000 cranes, Sarah suggested we send them to the owner of [Black Sheep Bakery](#) in Kentucky,” said Rochelle Nahmias, a member of the First Church's Mission and Social Justice Committee. “The young people in our church loved that idea. They also made it easy for others to participate.”

To help get the full community involved, free origami paper has been available on the porch of the Ashfield Hardware Store, and residents can view a YouTube video explaining how to fold the paper cranes – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ux1ECrNDZ14s>. Finished cranes should be returned to the porch of the Ashfield Hardware Store by Friday, March 26. The cranes will “fly” to Kentucky on March 27 in time for Holy Week and Easter.

Nahmias said the church has reached its 1,000 goal Sunday but even more origami cranes are welcomed. She said any extras that are not sent to Kentucky will be used to decorate the First Congregational Church in Ashfield, and others will be handed out with community meals at the Episcopal Church of Saints James and Andrew.

“What better way to celebrate Holy Week,” said Jones. “I'm very excited by the leadership of our young people in walking the talk of love and justice. The church is always talking about unity, about transcending left and right and searching out right from wrong. We won't get very far in that task without a bedrock of friendship which is a shared commitment to caring for one another unconditionally. And to have that, someone has to take the first courageous steps. Our youth are doing that for us with this creative project.”

Zack DeLuca can be reached at zdeluca@recorder.com or 413-930-4579.