



March / April 2023

# The Epistle

## From the Pastor's Pen

Friends,

As we are stepping into the Transitional work of this Interim time, I will be sharing a series of articles on the directions, trends, and concerns facing churches today. The following is one such article.

Blessings on your exploration and thank you for having me beside you in your journey of becoming.

7-Things to do When a Church is in Decline...

RON EDMONDSON ON February 12, 2020

What is going wrong? Why are fewer people attending and new people are not? Ask the hard questions. Is it programmatic, a people problem, or a Biblical issue? Don't be afraid to admit if your church is just plain boring. If nothing has changed in the last 10 years in the programs you offer, you may already have your answer. But ask questions. Ask for inside and outside opinions. This takes guts but is critically necessary. Ask visitors. Recruit a "secret shopper" attendee to give you an objective look at the church. Evaluate even if you are afraid to know the answers. You can't address problems until you know them.

## 2. Own it

The problems are real. Don't pretend they are not. At this step, cause or blame is not as important. They were important in the first step, because they may alter your response, but now the problems are yours. They are not going away without intentionality. Quit denying. Start owning the issues. I see too many churches avoid the issues because they are difficult — or unpopular — to address. Find a Bible story where people of God were called to do something that didn't involve a certain level of risk, hard work, fear, or the necessity of faith.

## 3. Address major, obvious Issues

This is hard. Perhaps the hardest one. If the church has "forgotten your first love" — repent. When the church holds on to bitterness and anger from the past — forgive. Sometimes walking by faith has been replaced by an abundance of structure. In these times, you may need to step out boldly into a new area of ministry. If the church is in disunity, it must come together first. When the church loves the traditions of men more than the commands of God, it must turn from sin. And, if the problems involve people, you can't be a people pleaser. (I told you this is hard.)

## 4. Find alignment

Where does the church best find unity? What will everyone get excited about doing? Many times, it is a vision or a moment in history that was special to everyone, a common thread within the DNA. Find it and focus attention on it. In my experience, God will not bless a church in disunity, but churches have an issue, cause, or program that everyone can get excited about and support. Church leaders must be working together to build enthusiasm, momentum, and unity.

*Continued top of page 8...*

**JOYS AND CONCERNS**

For our members, family and friends hospitalized, ill and in need of prayers, may God bless and watch over you:

- |                     |                             |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| Dolores Tamulen     | Jan Gordon                  |
| Tariq Malik         | James Gallant               |
| Bobbie DiBattista   | Dot                         |
| Brian & June Coombs | Audrey Brogan               |
| Charlie Snell       | Eleanor Brogan              |
| Lindsey Kuchta      | Lorna Ducharme              |
| Steve Collar        | Roxxe and Chris             |
| Sally Calhoun       | Bryan Castle                |
| Shirley Saari       | Carole Christensen          |
| Eddie Hannula       | Sally Aalto                 |
| Dee Smith           | Don McKendry                |
| Bob Anderson        | Sally Aalto's friend, Marge |
| Peter Rakowski      |                             |

More information can always be shared privately with Pastor Stacey at [fccw.pastor@outlook.com](mailto:fccw.pastor@outlook.com) or (603) 903-5621.

**"Prayer List"**

If you added somebody to the prayer list, please let us know when to remove their name.

Dear Charity Administrator,

This email is to notify you that **First Congregational Church** has been issued a **\$61.91** donation from the AmazonSmile Foundation as a result of AmazonSmile program activity between October 1 and December 31, 2022.

We are very proud of the difference that AmazonSmile has made over the past ten years, and we thank you for your support and partnership.

**Thank you!**

Mary Waight spearheads Yoga and Meditation groups that many of our congregation as well as others participate in throughout the year. The participants in those groups have donated a total of \$1015 to the church's general fund in honor of Mary. Per Jill Fichtel "This speaks well of their appreciation for all of the time, energy and caring Mary provides to those who participate in either or both groups. Mary is a model of service to others.



Condolence's to the family of Bob Sampson whom passed on February 17, 2023



We would like to say "Thank you" to the church school children and the CE Committee for the beautiful valentine card we received.

Your thoughtfulness is so appreciated.

Bless you all,

Gloria and Roy Hughes



**Trustee's Input –**

FYI.....As of mid-February the Church has lost \$85 when compared to the budgeted income amount for renting out the Parsonage. So far, we have spent funds on plumber's services to fix a water leak in the laundry room and appliance repair services for a cooling problem with the refrigerator and replacement of the icemaker. In the May – June timeframe we will have to fix or replace the picture window in the living room which has a hole in the outer pane of glass due to vandalism (a bb shot ???).



## Seeking Together: Lenten Lunch

Every Wednesday, through the end of Lent from 11:30am-1pm. This weekly mid-day Table Fellowship experience will draw us into the weekly questions and Sunday's scripture passage. Join Pastor Stacey for this Bible study and faith exploration series.



April 2 **Palm Sunday:** Traditional Intergenerational Worship with Communion

(The Maundy Thursday and evening Good Friday services will flow one into the other as we travel with the Disciples and Jesus from a shared meal into the garden and then from the Garden to the cross.)

### Thursday, April 6, Maundy Thursday

\*\*Maundy Thursday Service @ 7 PM in Covenant Hall

A service of intimacy and interdependence.

### Friday, April 7, (Good Friday)

\*\*Noon - 4 PM Visio-Devina in Sanctuary

(engage in the Lenten art series with written guided reflections and independent prayer time)

\*\*7 PM Good Friday Service of Sorrow and Lament. Meet Pastor Stacey on the side lawn of the church

### EASTER

\*\*6:00 AM Community Easter Sunrise Service @ Academy Hill.

Leadership will be provided by area Pastors, including our own, and Jason Cox, Fire Chaplin.

\*\*9:30 AM in Sanctuary Easter Worship Service

## OUR FATHER'S HOUSE CLOSES

As you may have heard, Our Father's House will no longer be providing services and shelters for the unhoused people in our communities. This is due to a change in funding.

Our Church has supported Our Father's House through monetary donations as well as donations of various supplies. These donations were always greatly appreciated.

Since the shelter has closed the Women's Fellowship will no longer be collecting your donations. The donation container in Fellowship Hall will be removed.

Thank you for your support of this program.

**Last day to order Tulips: Thursday, March 23**


## Worship Live Streaming




The Deacons and Pastor Stacey have been discussing the merits of returning to providing our worship services online through YouTube and/or Facebook. We are hoping there are a couple of volunteers in the church willing to learn about how to do this and help us make it happen on Sunday mornings. We have learned that live-streaming reduces the necessary work after worship, though adds a bit of coordination for our staff before.

Pastor Stacey is able to teach anyone who might be interested in helping us with this task. The necessary skills are: comfort with computers that you would be able to follow a step-by-step guide; an artistic eye that would lead you to shift a camera angle for a better picture; an awareness of how to navigate online search engines.

 **March** 2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 11:30a 1p Lenten Lunch (FH) 6:30-8:00 PM Scouts (CH) 7:00 PM AA (FH)	2 10:45 AM Outreach 5:30 PM Choir Rehearsal 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry	3  Office closed	4
5 9:30 AM Intergenerational Worship	6 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom)	7 8:00 AM Yoga 10:00 AM Staff (Parlor) 6:00-7:30 PM Scouts (CH) 7:00 PM Diaconate	8 11:30a-1p Lenten Lunch (FH) 6:30 Scouts (CH) 7:00 PM AA (FH)	9 5:30 PM Choir Rehearsal 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry 3:00 PM Trustees (FH)	10  Office closed	11
12 9:30 AM Church School 9:30 AM Worship Service 10:45 AM Church Council (CH)	13 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom) 5:45 PM-7:00 PM Cub Scouts (CH) 6:00-7:30 PM Cub Scouts (FH)	14 8:00 AM Yoga 10:00 AM Staff (Parlor) 1:00 PM Safe Church	15 11:30a 1p Lenten Lunch (FH) 6:30-8:00 PM Scouts (CH) 7:00 PM AA (FH)	16 5:30 PM Choir Rehearsal 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry 5:45-7:30 Cub Scouts (CH)	17  Office closed	18 4-8 PM Scouts Spaghetti Dinner (FH)
19 9:30 AM Church School 9:30 AM Worship Service  <i>One Great hour of Sharing</i>	20 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom)	21 8:00 AM Yoga 10:00 AM Staff (Parlor) 6:00 PM GGM (Parlor)	22 11:30a 1p Lenten Lunch (FH) 6:30-8:00 PM Scouts (CH) 7:00 PM AA (FH)	23 5:30 PM Choir Rehearsal 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry	24  Office closed	25
26 9:30 AM Church School 9:30 AM Worship/Palm Sunday 10:45 AM Welcoming Committee (Parlor)	27 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom) 6:00-7:30 PM Cub Scouts (FH)	28 8:00 AM Yoga 10:00 AM Staff (Parlor) 6:00 PM Generous Giving (Parlor)				

 **April** 2023

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						1
2 9:30 AM Intergenerational Worship	3 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom)	4 8:00 AM Yoga (Zoom) 10:00 AM Staff (Parlor) 6:00-7:30 PM Cub Scouts (CH) 7:00 PM Diaconate	5 11:30a 1p Lenten Lunch (FH) 6:00-8:00 PM Scouts (CH) 7:00 PM AA (FH)	6 3:00 PM Trustee (FH) 5:30 PM Choir Rehearsal 7:00 PM Maundy Thursday Service	7 7:00 PM Good Friday Service  Office closed	8
9 6:00 AM Sunrise Service at Academy Hill 9:30 AM Easter Service (Sanctuary) 	10 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom) 5:45 PM-7:00 PM Cub Scouts (CH) 6:00-7:30 PM Cub Scouts (FH)	11 8:00 AM Yoga (Zoom) 10:00 AM Staff (Parlor)	12 11:30a 1p Lenten Lunch (FH) 6:30-8:00 PM Scouts (CH) 7:00 PM AA (FH)	13 5:30 PM Choir Rehearsal 5:45-7:30 Cub Scouts (CH) 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry	14  Office closed	15
16 9:30 AM Church School 9:30 AM Worship Service 10:45 AM Annual Meeting Sanctuary	17 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom) 6:00-7:30 PM Cub Scouts (FH)	18 8:00 AM Yoga 10:00 AM Staff (Parlor) 6:00-7:30 PM Cub Scouts (FH)	19 11:30a 1p Lenten Lunch (FH) 6:30-8:00 PM Scouts (CH) 7:00 PM AA (FH)	20 5:30 PM Choir Rehearsal 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry 7:00 PM Scouts (Friendship Room)	21  Office closed	22
23 9:30 AM Church School 9:30 AM Worship	24 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom) 6:00-7:30 PM Cub Scouts (FH)	25 8:00 AM Yoga (Zoom) 10:00 AM Staff (Parlor) 6:00 PM Generous Giving (Parlor)	26 11:30a 1p Lenten Lunch (FH) 6:30-8:00 PM Scouts (CH) 7:00 PM AA (FH)	27	28  Office closed	29
30 9:30 AM Church School 9:30 AM Worship 10:45 Women's Fellowship (Parlor)						

**CHRISTIAN OUTREACH**

One Great Hour of Sharing

March 19, 2023

So, let's not allow ourselves to get fatigued doing good. At the right time we will harvest a good crop if we don't give up or quit. Right now, therefore, every time we get the chance, let us work for the benefit of all."

Galatians 6:9-10 [The Message]



The theme for the 2023 One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) offering is **"It's Time to Share,"** based on Galatians 6:9-10.

In Galatians, the Apostle Paul encourages followers of Jesus to generously help and care for others. Though there is great need in the world and we can grow weary because we do not know how to help, God's Spirit energizes and re-energizes us in every season.

We can make a difference. We do make a difference. Your generosity make all the difference. Your gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing provide immediate aid and long-term support to people experiencing hunger, thirst, disaster, or crisis around the world.

The need has never been greater. The opportunity is now. **It's time to share.**

The Outreach Committee

## CHRISTIAN OUTREACH

Souper Bowl Sunday was a huge success, and the Christian Outreach Committee would like to thank all that participated. Stocking our Food Pantry with almost 3 dozen cans of soup will certainly warm a lot of people in our community throughout the next few months.

A big thank you to the Sunday School children for helping to bring it to the front of the church. Nice to see those soup kettles so full.

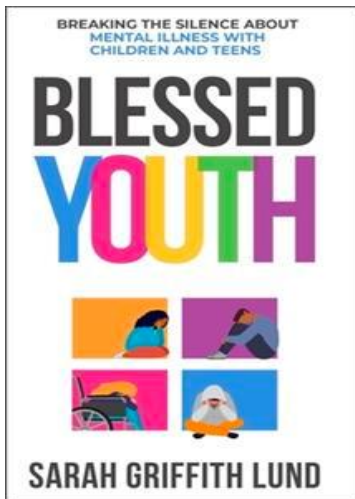
A special coffee hour followed the service where money was collected for this special Sunday. A big thank you to Candi Hitchcock and Sammi Dawley for the special refreshments.

### The Outreach Committee



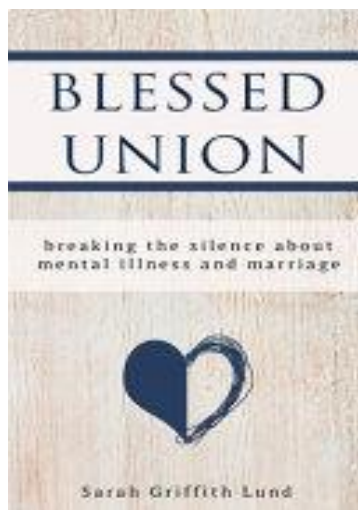
## CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

### Resources for Families



Through vivid and powerful storytelling, *Blessed Youth*:

*Breaking the Silence about Mental Illness with Children and Teens* will remove the barriers of stigma and shame associated with mental illness in children and teens. Readers will know they are not alone and be reminded of God's grace and loving presence in the midst of the heartache and struggle of mental illness. In addition to stories of children and youth experiencing mental health challenges, *Blessed Youth* includes practical resources such as prayers and a guide for having age-appropriate talks with children about warning signs and how to get help for themselves and friends. Ultimately, this important resource offers hope and help for everyone who loves a child or youth with mental health challenges. Also available is *Blessed Youth Survival Guide*, a pocket-size companion guide for youth.



Mental illness impacts at least a quarter of all blessed unions. In this new book by the author of *Blessed are the Crazy*, Sarah Griffith Lund opens up about depression and post-traumatic stress disorder in her own marriage and shares stories of other couples who have been impacted by mental illnesses such as addiction, anxiety, autism spectrum disorder, bipolar disorder, eating disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder, postpartum depression, schizophrenia, suicidality, and more.

Using traditional marriage vows as a framework for the book, *Blessed Union* explores the challenges of loving in the midst of mental health challenges, why it happens, what we can do about it, and how our faith is connected to mental illness. This book reminds us that we are not alone and invites us to break the silence around marriage and mental illness.

Rev. Sarah Griffith Lund is the Senior pastor at First Congregational United Church of Christ and Minister for Disabilities and Mental Health Justice for the National United Church of Christ.

### **THANK YOU New Volunteers!!!**

Christian Education is excited to share that we have four new volunteers in our church school program.

We are grateful to Jessica Caouette, Brett Duncan, and Sarah Duncan for stepping forward to help with nursery care during worship on Sundays.

We are also grateful to Mary Waight who has volunteered to offer an occasional class focused on Deep Blue's Cooking Stations.

## 5. Regroup

At some point, regardless of how drained you feel from the decline, you've got to come to a strategy of what to do next. You need a roadmap of where you are going in the next season. (It is Biblical to think ahead. Consider Luke 14:28.) I've never personally been able to plan in great detail more than 12 months out (sometimes, especially in times of less clarity, only a few months), but you need a plan. Start with your overall vision and explore ideas of how to accomplish it again. Put some measurable goals in place to mark progress — things you'll do next week, next month, and in a few months down the road. It will hold you accountable if you have an action-oriented strategy and build momentum as people have something to look forward to doing.

## 6. Reignite

Put your energy and resources where it matters most. This often involves getting back to the basics of what it takes to achieve your vision. If you are a church with a heart for missions, for example, amp up your mission efforts. When special events are the church's wheelhouse, then do them. It may mean not doing things that aren't working or things that tend to drain energy and resources. Look for what is working or has the potential to work again (the fastest) and begin to stir energy around that program or ministry. You need quick wins so the church can feel a sense of progress again.

## 7. Celebrate

There will be wins. You may have to look for them some days but celebrate when they occur. Remind people that God is still moving among you. Now, it should be noted, for the overly celebratory types, that you can't celebrate everything. If everything is wonderful or amazing, then wonderful and amazing is really average. They need to be legitimate wins. If you celebrate mediocrity, you'll set a precedent of mediocrity. But, when you see signs of heading in the right direction, make a big deal out of it.

If you want to see the church growing again, if the church yearns for health again, I strongly encourage you to be intentional. Be willing to ask for help. Raise the white flag and invite honest dialogue.

The harvest is ready. The workers are few. We need you! We are losing too many churches and not planting and reviving enough. Do the hard work. Pray without ceasing. And trust your labor will not be in vain.

# CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

## Have You Considered Teaching Church School

Christian Education hopes to recruit four additional teachers for Church School. This will allow for a rotation to be established for our main teachers so that everyone has a couple of Sundays each month to be in worship. We will be running a "training" for those interested in how to use the curriculum and engage children and youth in a one room classroom model at their age levels.

Maybe you are interested in helping, but would prefer not to be a lead teacher. We are also seeking volunteers who might float between our classrooms and help tend to bathroom breaks for children, finding parents when necessary, and more, supporting the lead teachers in running activities. If you are open to considering this, please reach out to Pastor Stacey or Beth Heckman.



**From the Trustees and Safe Church Committee...**

**BUILDING UPDATE**

Safe Church and the Trustees have been working to update procedures and ensure safety aspects of our church building are in order. In the recent weeks, the emergency button system was tested, the building inspected by the fire department and the kitchen by the health department, and the AED was serviced.

**AED**

The AED is now in working order. The Trustees have contracted a service provider for the device to ensure that it is always available if it is needed. We have learned that it is important for the cabinet to remain closed and the device untouched, except for in emergency situations. Handling the device when it is not needed can result in it being rendered useless for emergencies.



For those of you who are not already doing it, please consider the following.

**On-Line Giving using Bill Pay**

I hope that I find everyone well.

Some of you may find it difficult to remember that we are counting on the pledge that you made last fall in support of our church.

Many people in our congregation have already discovered that On-Line Giving using Bill Pay is an easy way to donate to the church. A big Thank-You to them.

I am suggesting that anyone in the congregation who is willing to try something new and make their lives easier, check with their bank and figure out how to make their pledge to the Church using the bank's Bill Pay feature. Most banks allow automatic payments on a schedule of weekly, monthly or even quarterly.

If there is anyone who would like to try this way to complete your pledge but needs help in figuring out how to do it, please let me know and I will be happy to help you do it.

John Aalto, Church Treasurer ([johnaalto@verizon.net](mailto:johnaalto@verizon.net) or 978-874-0220)

So, **Bottom Line** .... If you are having trouble remembering to send in you weekly, monthly or quarterly pledges, please consider Bill Pay from your bank account. Even though we are not meeting at the church each Sunday, the Church is counting on you to fulfill your pledge.



Pastor Stacey is preparing to facilitate a new member forum. If you would like to consider becoming a member of the church, please email Pastor Stacey at [fccw.pastor@outlook.com](mailto:fccw.pastor@outlook.com)

**Coat Drive**

There is a box outside of Stacey's office for gently worn coats. It will remain there so that anyone doing spring cleaning (once winter leaves us) might choose to part ways with a coat or jacket.

Bring it in! :)

Thank you,  
Anne Ring





January 18, 2023

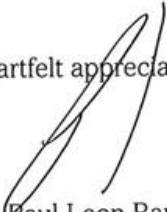
First Congregational Church UCC  
Reverend Stacey Kullgren, Interim Pastor  
Post Office Box 477  
Westminster, MA 01473-0477

Dear Reverend Kullgren,

I write hoping this finds you and yours safe and well this holiday season. The Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund allow the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance (UCBMA) to provide **overwhelming joy** to working and retired pastors, lay employees of our churches, and their surviving spouses during times of crisis.

Your gifts to the Christmas Fund always go to help people in need, when they need it. And thanks to you, no request goes unfulfilled. So many lives are impacted, and so much spiritual support is conveyed through the gifts you make each year. Thank you again for your generosity and I wish you a blessed and merry Christmas season.

With heartfelt appreciation,

  
Rev. Dr. Paul Leon Ramsey  
Philanthropy Officer

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*United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization (EIN: 13-5562403). Gifts to UCBMA are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law. Please consult your tax advisor for further information.*

Date: 1/6/2023

Amount: \$396

Check #: 932

Fund: Christmas Fund



The Pension Boards—United Church of Christ  
**United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance**  
475 Riverside Drive, Room 1020 New York, NY 10115  
1.800.642.6543 ministerialassistance@pbucc.org

## Silver Lake

Join us for Spring Action Weekend  
April 28-30, 2023



### Youth registration:

Action Weekends are open to youth in grades 9 through 12. Cost is \$45 per person.

### Adult registration:

Adult registration is free, donations greatly appreciated.

### A Note About Immunizations

Silver Lake follows the immunization requirements for students and staff in Connecticut schools.

In addition, Silver Lake requires all guests to our site to be fully vaccinated against Covid-19. If your camper has a medical exemption, please contact us for more information.

[www.SilverLakeCT.org/events](http://www.SilverLakeCT.org/events)

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## SUMMER CAMP AND RETREATS FOR ALL AGES

Consider one of our three New England UCC camp programs. All of these camp options are described as life changing, exciting, welcoming, and filled with spirit by children, youth, and adults. All anchor the day with morning worship, meal time prayers, evening vespers, and exploration of scripture in our daily lives.

Horton Center on Pine Mountain in Northern New Hampshire: hiking, canoeing, caving, arts, archery and so much more...

<https://hortoncenter.org/summer-camp-sessions/>

Silver Lake in Connecticut: swimming, boating, challenge courses, arts, games, nature adventures and more!

<https://www.silverlakect.org/summercamp>

Pilgrim Lodge in Maine: swimming, boating, archery and more on Lake Umbagog

<https://www.pilgrimlodge.org/camps/>

You can copy links or type into search bar if unable to open.

The First Congregational Church  
of Westminster  
United Church of Christ  
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Westminster, MA 01473

The Epistle  
March / April 2023  
Phone: 978-874-5790

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Visit our Website at [www.westcong.org](http://www.westcong.org)

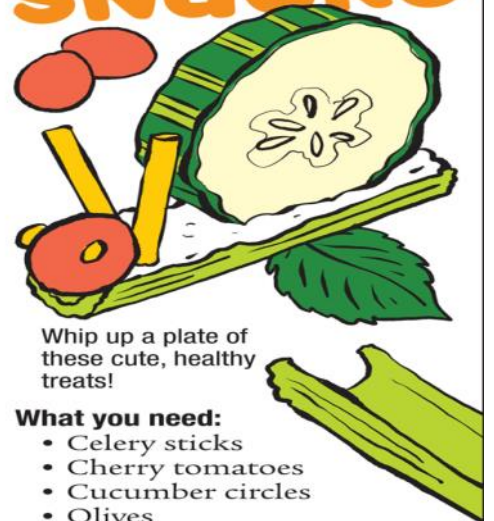
Don't Miss the

**DEADLINE!**

**April 18, 2023**



## SPRINGTIME SNACKS



Whip up a plate of these cute, healthy treats!

### What you need:

- Celery sticks
- Cherry tomatoes
- Cucumber circles
- Olives
- Cream cheese spread
- Fresh basil leaves (optional)
- Adult help

### What you do:

1. Have an adult help you wash and cut the veggies.
2. Spread cream cheese inside the celery rods.
3. Place a cucumber circle upright in the cream cheese to make a bug body.
4. Add the tomato as a head.
5. Arrange basil leaves on a plate and place the veggie bugs on them.
6. Making different-shaped bugs with your favorite veggies. Enjoy!

