### Abuse Prevention and Reporting Policy – Edmonds Presbyterian Church

### General Purpose Statement

**Edmonds Presbyterian Church** seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children and vulnerable adults who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect the children and vulnerable adults of the churchfrom incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

### Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the terms “child” or “children” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. “Vulnerable Adult” refers to any adult who is vulnerable due to illness, incapacitation, or emotional fragility. The term “worker” includes both paid and volunteer persons who work with children.

### Selection of Workers

All persons who desire to work with the children or vulnerable adults participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

1. **One Year Rule**  
   No applicant will be considered for any volunteer position involving contact with children/ vulnerable adults until she/he has been involved with Edmonds Presbyterian Church for a minimum of one (1) year. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant.
2. **Written Application**All persons seeking to work with children / vulnerable adults must complete and sign a written application in a form to be supplied by us. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children / vulnerable adults, previous church affiliation, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at the church
3. **Personal Interview**Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.
4. **Reference Checks**Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, at least two of the applicants’ references will be checked. These references should be of an institutional nature as opposed to personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at the church.
5. **Criminal Background Check**  
   A criminal background check is required for all employees (regardless of position) and for the following categories of volunteers:
   * Those serving in leadership as elders or deacons
   * Those serving as volunteers in our Sunday school, youth program or childcare.
   * Those who serve as counters for our collections
   * Those who serve as lead usher

A Washington State Patrol background check (WATCH program) is deemed sufficient for those who have resided in the state of Washington for more than five years. A national background check will be conducted for those persons who have moved more recently to Washington State.

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing the church/synagogue/meeting to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, she/he will be unable to volunteer in any area of church life which requires a background check.

What constitutes a disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by Pastor in consultation with the Session on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file at the church.

### Two Adult Rule

It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. If it becomes necessary for only one adult teacher to be in attendance during the class session, regular but unscheduled visits by an unrelated adult (usher or personnel committee member) shall take place, and there should be no fewer than two students with the adult teacher. We do not allow minors to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity.

### Responding to Allegations of Child / Elder Abuse

For purposes of this policy, “child abuse” is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

* **Physical abuse** – any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
* **Emotional abuse** – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
* **Sexual abuse** – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
* **Neglect** – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children / vulnerable adults under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of persons at Edmonds Presbyterian Church becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a person under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to the Pastor or a Session Elder for further action including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at Edmonds Presbyterian Church or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the child / vulnerable adult will be notified.
2. The worker alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with children / vulnerable adults pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation.
3. Civil authorities will be notified, and the church will comply with the state’s requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. The church will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities. The state reporting hotline for child or elder abuse is:  1-866-ENDHARM (1-866-363-4276).
4. The Presbytery of Northwest Coast shall be notified by contacting the Executive Presbyter, the Stated Clerk, and/or the Commission on Ministry. The Presbytery office may be reached at 425-355-0922. The reporting procedure of the Presbytery shall be followed as applicable.
5. Our insurance company (GuideOne Insurance, as of the adoption of this policy) will be notified, and we will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
6. The session will name a spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect. We will seek the advice of legal counsel before responding to media inquiries or releasing information to the congregation. All other representatives of the church should refrain from speaking to the media.
7. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it.
8. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children, youth or vulnerable adults.

**This policy was established and adopted by the session in this form on \_\_August 9, 2014\_.**