Westminster Presbyterian Church Child Protection Policy – 2016

Westminster Presbyterian Church (the “**Church**”) is committed to providing a safe and secure environment free from sexual or physical abuse or neglect for children and youth participating in our programs. The goals of this Child Protection Policy (this “**Policy**”) are:

* to protect children and youth in Church programs,
* to educate workers and care givers concerning the reality of child abuse and our policy in the event of abuse,
* to protect staff, volunteers and the Church as a whole, from allegations of abuse and neglect.

# Procedure for Screening Persons Working with Children or Youth

## All Compensated Workers and Volunteer Workers will complete a Volunteer / Background Check Release Form to work with Children and Youth.

## A Pastor or the Chairman of the Administrative Committee of the Session will conduct a personal interview of each Compensated Worker and, at his or her discretion, any Volunteer Worker.

## Reference checks will be made on all Compensated Workers and, at the discretion of a Pastor or the Chairman of the Administrative Committee of the Session, any Volunteer Worker. Reference checks will be conducted by phone interviews and/or by mail and will be documented with the Volunteer Form.

## A background check shall be conducted on each Worker.

## All information provided in the Application Form, as well as any information collected through reference checks or other investigation or inquiries, is confidential Church property and is not to be released to any other party except on a need-to-know basis with the approval of a Pastor or the Chairman of the Administrative Committee of the Session.

## All confidential information collected as part of this application process will be reviewed and approved by a Pastor or the Chairman of the Administrative Committee of the Session.

# Policy Statement for Workers with Children and Youth

## Persons who have been convicted of or pled guilty to physical or sexual abuse or endangerment of Children or Youth or against whom such charges are pending, will not be allowed to work with Children or Youth.

## Persons who have been convicted of or pled guilty to serious/violent crimes against persons or against whom such charges are pending, will not be allowed to work with Children or Youth.

## Adult survivors of childhood sexual or physical abuse need the love and acceptance of the Church. Individuals who have such a history will discuss their desire to work with Children or Youth with a Pastor prior to engaging in any such service.

## Except as approved by a Pastor, an association with our church for six (6) months is a prerequisite for all Volunteer Workers before working with Children or Youth.

# Supervisor Policy for Compensated and Volunteer Workers

## In **classroom-type** situations for Youth, a single Worker may be present. However normally, two Workers should be present at all times during any activity involving Children or Youth. This rule reduces the risk of abuse and also reduces the risk of false accusations. If a worker is alone with youth or children, the classroom door must be open.\*

## Workers should not be alone with a Child or Youth *and* out of the sight of others.

## Questionable or inappropriate behavior should be reported immediately to a Pastor, as such conduct can precede abuse, even though the observed act itself does not constitute abuse.

## If a person desires to plan a Church program that involves the supervision or care of Children or Youth off Church property, he/she must make sure it is on the Church calendar and all Child Protection Policies will be followed.

## Windows in the doors to classrooms used with Children or Youth must be made of shatter-proof glass and must not be obstructed such that others cannot see in. If no window exists for the door to any such classroom, such door will be kept open.

## Restroom supervision: At Church or in a public location, Workers will check to ensure suspicious or unknown individual are not occupying the restroom before allowing Children or Youth to use the facilities. Children and Youth will be sent in pairs when possible. Workers will call upon a ‘floating’ Worker if available to assist in restroom supervision in order to maintain the two-person policy. Workers will wait outside or stand in the doorway of the restroom to allow for privacy for the children and protection for the Worker. If younger children need assistance, keep door open and find another Worker in order to maintain the two-person policy.

# Procedures for Reporting Incidents of Abuse of a Child or Youth

## If an incident of physical or sexual abuse of a Child or Youth is witnessed or reasonably suspected at the Church or in connection with a Church program (an “**Incident**”), then the following actions will be taken:

### Such Incident will be reported as soon as possible (and at least within 24 hours) to the Director of the Department of Social Services of Mecklenburg County at (704) 336-CARE (2273) and to a Pastor. Reports from persons requesting to remain anonymous will be made by telephone in the presence of a witness.

### The person reporting such Incident will document, in writing, for the Church all known facts and circumstances. Any witness to reporting shall acknowledge in writing any anonymous reporting and the contents thereof.

### A Pastor will verify that a report of such Incident has been made with the Director of the Department of Social Services of Mecklenburg County within twenty-four (24) hours or, if such a report cannot be verified, will make such a report as soon as possible.

### The parents/guardians of the alleged victim will be notified immediately, unless there is reasonable suspicion that such parents/guardians may also be the perpetrators.

## The safety of the alleged victim must be safeguarded before the alleged perpetrator is confronted.

# Responding to Incidents of Abuse of a Child or Youth

## Every Incident will be taken seriously. Adequate care and respect must be offered to alleged victims and alleged perpetrators until the allegation can be substantiated or cleared.

## Any person accused must be treated with dignity and support. That person will be immediately relieved of all further responsibilities at the Church in respect to Children or Youth and, at the discretion of a Pastor, any other responsibilities, until the investigation is completed and allegations are cleared or substantiated.

## A Pastor will maintain a confidential record of each Incident and document all steps taken in the course of responding to or handling such Incident.

## To the extent consistent with the Church’s legal and moral obligations, the confidentiality of all persons involved in the Incident or reporting or responding to the Incident will be safeguarded.

## A Pastor will notify the liability insurer and attorney for the Church about the Incident.

## An in-depth investigation will be carried out by the civil authorities rather than Church personnel. If the civil authorities decline to undertake such investigation, then the Church, in consultation with its insurance company and its attorney, will consider if further action is needed.\*

## The Senior Pastor will be the sole spokesperson for the Church in respect to any Incident.

# Volunteer Guidelines for Special Circumstances

## When the Church is aware that a Worker in Children’s or Youth ministry has a condition or is in a situation that might impair or negatively impact the ministry, the Church will ask them to step away until the situation is resolved. The Church and Worker will seek professional guidance to determine if, when and in what capacity this person can resume working with our Youth and Children.

# Use of Church Facilities by Other Organizations\*

## Any organization that desires to use facilities of the Church for the purpose, whether in whole or in part, of supervising or caring for Children or Youth must, as a condition to such use, operate under adequate hiring, screening and reporting procedures issued by such organizations. Such procedures must be submitted to and approved by a Pastor prior to such use.

## Any organization that desires to use facilities of the Church for the purpose, whether in whole or in part, of supervising or caring for Children or Youth must, as a condition to such use, agree to notify a Pastor as soon as possible about any Incident occurring at Church facilities in connection with its use of Church facilities and to prohibit any person affiliated with such organization who is suspected of physical or sexual abuse of a Child or Youth from participating in any activity of such organization at Church facilities.

# Training and Education

1. All Workers will read and sign the Volunteer/Background Check Release Form. Reading this Child Protection Policy is part of the Volunteer Form.

## An introduction to this Policy will be a part of new member orientation.