



**LEADERSHIP
ROUNDTABLE**
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Leadership Roundtable calls for seminaries to implement new national benchmarks for sexual misconduct policies

WASHINGTON, D.C.— Leadership Roundtable released the following statement from Partner Michael Brough, encouraging U.S. seminary and formation house leaders to implement national benchmarks released Monday by a Seminary Study Group from McGrath Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame. The five benchmarks call on seminary leaders to implement a comprehensive policy for responding to sexual abuse and harassment. The benchmarks were developed by a representative working group of both lay and ordained stakeholders, including seminary rectors and bishops, following research which revealed that as many as 10 percent of seminarians experience some form of sexual abuse or harassment and that less than 60 percent of seminarians were “very aware” of seminary policies and procedures concerning sexual misconduct.

“We join the call for all seminaries and houses of religious formation in the United States to publicly commit to the benchmarks released today by the McGrath Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame. The 2019 study of seminarians demonstrated both the positive impact of reforms undertaken in the past 20 years, and the need for further improvement in how sexual abuse and harassment is reported as well as education of how to identify it.

“These benchmarks are a model of co-responsibility, where lay and ordained leaders work together to address challenges facing our Church. They are an important step towards building a culture of transparency and accountability in the Church. These benchmarks help lay the foundation for a new culture within the Church by developing future generations of leaders who are committed to, and formed by, policies and procedures that keep everyone safe.”

To read more about the benchmarks visit: mcgrath.nd.edu/news/a-call-to-action/

For additional recommendations for Church leaders to increase transparency, accountability, and co-responsibility at every level of the Church and in all Church institutions visit:

leadershiproundtable.org/what-we-do/our-resources/summit-reports/

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Leadership Roundtable promotes best practices and accountability in the management, finances, communications, and human resources development of the Catholic Church in the U.S., including greater incorporation of the expertise of the laity.

Benchmarks for Seminary and House of Formation Sexual Misconduct Policies

- 1. Systematic Training** – Seminarians, faculty, and staff must be trained consistently and repeatedly (at least annually, and upon starting at the seminary), regarding policies on sexual harassment, especially reporting procedures, definitions, and the investigative process, including possible outcomes and follow up.
- 2. Reporting and Investigation** – Reporting systems must include both internal reporting procedures as well as the ability to report issues to an agency outside of the seminary structure that is independent of the seminary or any other structure that can affect the reporter in a way that might discourage them from coming forward. Independent investigators should have some knowledge of Catholic seminaries and ecclesial norms.
- 3. Victim Support** – Must have a sufficiently independent process to support victims/reporters as the process works through issues (e.g. Victim Assistance Coordinator) that is also able to protect the confidentiality of the investigation and guard against retaliation. Appropriate spiritual direction and counseling, etc., should also be available.
- 4. Proactivity** – Policy should create periodic queries to allow seminaries to assess their culture in terms of policy understanding among seminarians, faculty, and staff, as well as to provide direct opportunities to report any issues so that they may be addressed. These internal assessments of seminary culture should include not only sexual misconduct, but a broad range of potentially improper relationships between all seminary students, faculty, and staff.
- 5. Consistency and Portability** – Policies may be implemented in different ways, but they should remain in accord with common principles so that while procedures may differ somewhat based on local resources or conditions, they should be “portable,” that is, provide consistent and understandable protection for the variety of assignments and venues in which seminarians may be assigned (for example, parish assignments).