



Benchmarks for Seminary and House of Formation Sexual Misconduct Policies

The following national benchmarks were released on November 9, 2020 by a Seminary Study Group from McGrath Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame. Leadership Roundtable was part of this study group. The five benchmarks below 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 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.

- 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).

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