

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Contact:** Bill Casey

## **Virginia Theological Seminary tackles sexual assault**

**Presents award-winning play "Conversations with My Molester" to promote awareness**

[Alexandria, VA] Accounts of sexual abuse and sexual assault are on the increase worldwide. Virginia Theological Seminary (VTS) is taking a dramatic step to confront this issue by sponsoring a remarkable theatrical performance.

Called "**Conversations with My Molester: A Journey of Faith**", this award-winning autobiographical solo play will be performed at VTS on Saturday, May 3rd at 7:30pm at the Lettie Pate Evans Chapel auditorium.

Author-actor Michael Mack's one-man play has received widespread acclaim for its "spellbinding" (Cambridge Chronicle) portrayal of his odyssey from clergy sexual abuse as a child to healing as an adult. Open to the public. (Ticketing information below.)

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Born in Washington DC and raised in the Metro area in a devout Catholic family, Mack wanted to be a priest. But that dream ended at age 11 when his pastor invited him to the rectory to help with "a project."

Mack was profoundly shaken, and soon left the Church. But he wrestled for decades with disturbing questions about spirituality and sexuality, imagining one day meeting his abuser for a conversation. Forty years later he had that chance -- landing on his former pastor's doorstep.

"Conversations with My Molester: A Journey of Faith" is a 90-minute lyric drama. Directed by stage veteran Daniel Gidron, it portrays Mack's decades-long journey away from -- and back to -- the Roman Catholic Church.

The play premiered in Boston in 2012 at the 10-year anniversary of the clergy sexual abuse crisis. Its complex, human portrait netted rave reviews from the media -- but also from Catholic parishioners and clergy, and even the Boston Archdiocese itself. It subsequently played at Catholic churches in the Boston area, including Mack's own parish -- St. Paul's Catholic Church near his current home in Cambridge.

The play won an Artist Grant for Dramatic Writing from the Massachusetts Cultural Council -- the state's most competitive and prestigious individual arts fellowship, and also received an IRNE nomination for Best Solo Play from the Independent Reviewers of New England. A recent show at the Catholic Paulist Center in Boston netted a feature article on the front page of the national news section of **The New York Times**.

Mary Lynn Schwalbach, a Masters of Divinity candidate at VTS, is spearheading the effort to bring Mack's play to VTS. "The goal at VTS of Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) is to raise awareness and provide education regarding sexual violence," said Schwalbach, student coordinator for SAAM. "We want to give people -- particularly survivors of sexual violence -- a time and place to share their stories. 'Conversations with my Molester' will be another way of

telling the truth about sexual assault and furthering the conversation in our community and beyond." VTS is the largest accredited Episcopal seminary in the world.

The show will be followed by an audience Q&A with Michael Mack. "Both the play and the conversation afterwards are for and about healing," said Mack, who calls his work a kind of ministry. "I never became a priest," he said, "but I've always felt a spiritual calling, and this play is my way of furthering reconciliation and social justice."

While not graphic, Mack's play is sometimes intense -- as well as funny and even comforting. "We've heard many stories of sexual abuse and assault," Mack said. "but fewer about healing. I hope to offer an authentic portrayal of the reality of recovery."

Mack is a graduate of the MIT Writing Program and now lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He is best known for his multi-character solo play "Hearing Voices, Speaking in Tongues" -- about his mother's life with, and recovery from, schizophrenia. Mack has been much in demand for the play, which he has performed at the US Library of Congress, Off-Off-Broadway at the Times Square Arts Center, at Harvard and Yale universities, for scores of mental health conferences -- and even at the FBI's 32nd Annual Hostage Negotiation Seminar in Baltimore.

Learn more at  
[www.michaelmacklive.com](http://www.michaelmacklive.com)

"Conversations with My Molester: a Journey of Faith" will be performed on Saturday, May 3rd at 7:30pm at the Lettie Pate Evans Chapel auditorium on the campus of Virginia Theological Seminary, located at 3737 Seminary Road, Alexandria, VA 22304. Open to the public. Free parking. Tickets \$7.00 (\$5.00 with student ID). More at [www.michaelmacklive.com](http://www.michaelmacklive.com).

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