

Gay group welcomes condemnation by bishops of bullying

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A group representing gay and lesbian people has welcomed the recent condemnation by the Catholic Bishops of Ireland of bullying because of sexual orientation.

The Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (Glen) referred to the bishops' recent pastoral letter for young people. Eoin Collins, director of policy change in Glen, said he welcomed the condemnation of bullying and abuse of gay people.

"Young lesbian and gay people frequently experience bullying, abuse and violence in, and outside the school environment. This can lead to isolation, depression and for some, risk of suicide," he said. "The bishops' statement is an important acknowledgment of the extent of this bullying and of the need to counteract it."

He said Glen urged the Department of Education and the school management bodies to act on the issues raised by the bishops and develop policies and programmes to make schools a safe learning environment for young lesbian and gay students.

The pastoral message acknowledged that the traditional church structures did not always reach out to, and listen to young people.

It said the ministry could not be uniform. People had different needs and the church must reach out by providing a full "cycle of care". Some hungered for spiritual support. Others had had little experience of spiritual nourishment. Others were uninterested or burdened by pain and guilt - for many had grown up with suffering or abuse.

"The experience of being bullied is widespread. This can happen on the basis of race, disability, gender, sexual orientation or social class. Any such victimisation of individuals or groups is unacceptable and to be condemned," the message stated.