NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

A letter to LGBT Catholics: It gets better

Kate Childs Graham | Oct. 19, 2010

At the end of my admissions interview for the Catholic University of America (CUA), I asked, ?Is this school welcoming for gay and lesbian people?? The interviewer responded simply, ?Yes.?

When I walked onto CUA?s campus for the first time as a student, I thought I was walking on to a safe and welcoming campus. Unfortunately, I was wrong.

In my years at CUA, I was called a fag in class. I was constantly reminded about the rules against ?homosexual activity? on campus. I was encouraged to live a chaste life by campus ministers. I was asked to resign from leading a women?s prayer group. I was ostracized from campus ministry activities. I was laughed at when I tried to start a support group for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students on campus. The list goes on.

And I struggled. I went to daily Mass as an act of repentance, denying myself the Holy Eucharist for months on end. I went to confession week after week, confessing one and only sin -- being who God made me. I questioned my faith. I questioned my God. I wondered if this life was worth living. I hit rock bottom.

And it got better. I left CUA with diploma in my hand and scars on my heart only to find a world full of acceptance and love. I realized that the people who mattered most were the people who love and support me for who I am. I reconciled my sexuality with my faith with the help of a few incredible friends. I met my partner, and our friends and family stood around us as we exchanged vows just two years ago. I found my place in this church and this world.

It?s gotten better at CUA as well, as a group of students have started an ?unofficial? gay-straight alliance on campus called CUAllies. They are working to make the campus a safe and welcoming place. I couldn?t be prouder.

In recent months, we have seen too many young people take their lives as a result of bullying. The world has spoken out. I hope that the Catholic church will do the same.

To the church hierarchy and other leaders of the church:

Please do not let yourselves or our church be labeled as a source of bullying. Help create and promote welcoming and inclusive schools, churches and homes that are free from judgment and bullying. Young people are looking to you for moral guidance and support. Please do not let them down. Don?t be a reason they feel unsafe, unloved and unwelcomed. Be the reason they know they are children of God and therefore are loved and worthy of respect.

To commenters and bloggers:

Please know that the impact of bullying doesn?t stop at the schoolhouse or church door. The impact of bullying is also felt from words of hate and judgment seen online. I challenge you to find creative ways to critique and

debate ideas without attacking the character, dignity or values of any person. I know that together we can make the internet a safe place for any person to express their thoughts or stories without being subject to personal ridicule or attack.

To Catholic youth:

It does get better. I once thought that in order to live my life as an openly gay person, I would have to give up my faith. Now I know that I can be both proudly gay and devoutly Catholic. For every person in the church who says that being gay is wrong or LGBT rights aren?t rights at all, know that there are many more Catholics who will love and support you for who you are. I found my Catholic home with organizations like Call To Action [1] and Dignity USA [2] who are provide a safe and welcoming place for gay Catholics -- for any Catholics -- to express our faith. I know that you will find your place in and out of the church.

To all Catholics:

Yes, it does get better for LGBT Catholic youth, but please know that we have the power to make it great. The teachings of the church hierarchy on homosexuality do not reflect the values and beliefs of the vast majority of Catholics. Standing together, we can create a church that is truly welcoming of all people. We can create a safe space for Catholic youth to explore their faith and their sexuality. We can create lasting change in a world and a church that so badly needs it. We can make life great.

If you are a young person who needs help, please contact theTrevor Project[3]. For LGBT Catholics and allies who are looking for a safe space in our church, please check outCall to Action[1] andDignity USA[2].

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