

Bishops' document on election goes high tech in podcast, video format

WASHINGTON – Ask Catholic teenagers if they've read a recent document by the U.S. bishops and you might get a blank look.

But ask if they've heard of the bishops' statement "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility," either through a podcast, a video quiz on YouTube or its page on the social networking site Facebook, and you might get a nod of recognition.

That's what the U.S. bishops are hoping anyway.

"Faithful Citizenship," the document that urges Catholic voters to form their consciences around a variety of social concerns based on Catholic social teaching, is not something new. The bishops initially published the document in 1975 and produce a new version of it about every four years to coincide with the national elections.

The document for the 2008 election was approved by the bishops in November 2007.

But this time the document looks a lot younger. For starters, its Web site, www.faithfulcitizenship.org, has resources for youths and those who work with them.

The site is "tech savvy," according to Jill Rauh, youth and young adult coordinator for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development.

"I think if the church is going to be effective at communicating the message of 'Faithful Citizenship,' and all its messages, it needs to do so in ways that are appealing to young people," Ms. Rauh said.

She said getting youths to go beyond just reading the text or hearing about it is key to the new push behind the "Faithful Citizenship" quizzes, an iPod contest on the

site and video clips. The hope is that young people will not only get the document's message but talk about it, reflect on it and apply it to their lives.

The Web site suggests some formats for talking about "Faithful Citizenship," such as one called "Coffee Discussion," which includes a series of questions about social issues and Catholic teaching that friends could informally talk about over coffee.

And youth ministers and religious educators are not limited to just making handouts of the document. Instead they are given ideas for skits, murals, open-microphone nights and prayer services based on "Faithful Citizenship."

Ms. Rauh told Catholic News Service the outreach to younger people is a recognition that they have "an important role to play in living out faith as leaders in the Catholic community. They are both the future and the present in our church."

And even if these Catholic youths are not old enough to vote, she said, they "still have a responsibility to be faithful citizens" - to be active in their communities and to challenge their leaders.

Across the country, youth and diocesan leaders have taken a variety of approaches in getting out the word on "Faithful Citizenship."

Becky VanPool, parish outreach and program development director for Catholic Charities of Oklahoma City, Okla., was working with the diocesan young adult ministry program to host a "Faithful Citizenship" barbecue Sept. 28.

During the evening, participants, including Oklahoma City Archbishop Eusebius J. Beltran, were to take part in small round-table discussions about the document.

Ms. VanPool said she was convinced the format to discuss faith and political issues would be "much more valuable than a presentation," although a small presentation was planned for the beginning to give an overview of Catholic social teaching.