

TOP STORY

Interfaith Justice Revival connects faith, advocacy in Collinsville

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Sep 6, 2026

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More than 20 people representing different faiths, races and communities gathered at Smith Memorial United Methodist Church on Aug. 27 for an evening focused on the connections among religious values, community concerns and civic advocacy.



Kathryn Haines (at right) from VICPP speaks about the importance of rural health care.

Bill Wyatt

The Interfaith Justice Revival combined food and fellowship with presentations about how different faith traditions approach justice and the responsibility to care for neighbors. Participants also shared challenges they see in their communities and

learned ways to advocate for changes in state policy.

The Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, a nonpartisan nonprofit organization, organized the gathering and advocates for economic, racial and social justice through education, prayer and action.

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Faith leaders, lay leaders and center staff discussed how concern for neighbors can extend beyond individual acts of service to involvement in public life. Attendees learned about several ways residents can seek change, including voting, communicating with legislators and advocating on issues before the Virginia General Assembly.

The Collinsville gathering was part of the center's second annual Interfaith Justice Revival Tour, which draws inspiration from traditional religious revivals while emphasizing community relationships, public policy and civic engagement.

Before the event, Sheila Herlihy Hennessee, the center's director of faith organizing, said the gatherings were intended to help residents connect faith with participation in public life.

"These events give people a chance to see faith in public life and understand how to make a difference," Hennessee said in a news release.

The tour previously visited Christiansburg, Tazewell, Wise and Abingdon in July, followed by gatherings in Farmville and Suffolk in August. The center said more than 100 people participated in the four Southwest Virginia stops.

The Virginia NAACP and Virginia Poverty Law Center partnered with the interfaith center on the tour, according to the event's website. Organizers said the gatherings were designed to center local residents' experiences while building relationships and sharing advocacy resources.

Although the Collinsville participants discussed challenges facing their communities, organizers did not release a detailed list of the concerns raised during the meeting.

The interfaith center's broader policy priorities include access to affordable health care, economic justice, criminal justice reform, affordable housing and civic engagement. Its work includes supporting living wages, affordable child care, tenants' rights and greater participation in elections and other public-policy decisions.

The organization describes itself as a coalition of more than 950 faith communities across Virginia.

The Aug. 27 meeting lasted about two hours. Rather than promoting a partisan position or candidate, the program emphasized giving residents tools to communicate their own priorities to elected officials and participate in the policymaking process.

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