
WATERBURY OIC

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RINGING THE BELL THEN & NOW

THEN — September 2016: Faith, Work & Economic Self-Sufficiency

The September 2016 edition of Ringing the Bell looked back to the earliest days of the OIC movement and Reverend Leon Sullivan's belief that communities could help create their own economic opportunities.

Reggie reflected on Sullivan bringing people together around a vision of economic development that went beyond prayer alone. Faith had to be accompanied by work. Communities needed training, jobs, businesses, ownership, and opportunities that allowed residents to participate in their own economic progress.

The column imagined what could happen when people worked collectively to create and support economic resources within their own communities and closed by recognizing those working toward inclusion, opportunity, equity, fairness, and respect.

NOW — September 2026: Workforce Development Is Community Development

Ten years later—and more than six decades after the founding of the OIC movement—the work continues.

At Waterbury OIC, economic self-sufficiency starts with helping people develop the skills and resources they need to move forward.

That may mean learning how to use a computer, preparing for an interview, receiving professional clothing, completing job-related training, earning a credential, developing digital media skills, or simply having someone help identify the next step.

But the impact reaches beyond one participant.

When someone gains skills, a family gains greater stability. When an employer finds prepared workers, a business becomes stronger. When residents have greater access to opportunity, the entire community benefits.

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WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT IS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Training People for Life Jobs change. Industries change. Technology changes.

But one principle has remained at the center of the Opportunities Industrialization Center movement from the beginning: Opportunity begins when people have access to the skills, resources, and support they need to become economically self-sufficient.

That idea guided Reverend Leon Sullivan when the OIC movement began more than six decades ago. It continues to guide Waterbury OIC today.

September is Workforce Development Month, providing an opportunity to recognize the people, organizations, employers, educators, and community partners working to connect residents with employment and economic opportunity. But workforce development is about more than placing someone in a job. It means preparing people to succeed once they get there. It means helping someone develop computer skills when technology has changed around them. It means helping a job seeker prepare for an interview. It means providing appropriate clothing so someone can walk into that interview with confidence. It means connecting people with certifications, training, and supportive services. It means introducing residents to emerging skills such as digital media and communications.

And sometimes it means simply helping someone figure out what their next step should be. At Waterbury OIC, we call that serving the whole person. Because when one resident becomes more economically secure, the impact doesn't stop with that individual.

- Families become stronger.
- Businesses gain employees.
- Neighborhoods become more stable.

And communities grow. *Workforce development is community development.*