

Joe Micon Intro

When I had the opportunity to pick someone for this year's Furfey Lecture, the first thing I thought about was the theme of this year's meeting: "Striving for a Better World: Religion and Social Change." The theme has an action component to it. It has to do with religion's role in improving the human condition. Furfey would have loved it. He was a Catholic priest and sociologist who believed that religion had an important role to play in fostering a more just and equal world. In contemporary terms, he was an applied sociologist, or—put differently—he did public sociology. Then, I asked myself this question: if Furfey were here with us this afternoon, who would he like to listen to? I concluded that he'd love to spend an hour with someone who has been actively involved in building a better world. I thought immediately of Joe Micon.

Joe got his bachelor's degree in applied sociology at Purdue in 1980, then a Masters in Social Work at Indiana University.

Getting degrees from such arch rival institutions was an early indication that Joe's ability to work with people on both sides of the isle. He is not an "either/or" guy; he's a "both/and" guy. From there, Joe took a job as a caseworker and program coordinator at the Lafayette Urban Ministry, better known as LUM. LUM is an ecumenical coalition of 47 mainline Protestant congregations and Catholic parishes. It serves low-income people through a variety of personal and family assistance programs and by advocating public policies that would remove social conditions that foster poverty. By 1990, Joe was the Director of the whole organization. He was the first layperson and first Catholic ever to hold that position. He remained Director until 2004, when he decided it was time to run for public office—specifically, a seat in the Indiana General Assembly, as a Democrat representing House District 26 (which includes the greater Lafayette area, Purdue University, and surrounding counties, which tend to be rural. Known as someone who could work well with people of different social class backgrounds, different faiths, and different political persuasions,

Joe won by a comfortable margin. He ran for reelection in 2006 and won by an even wider margin. He is Vice Chair of the Indiana House Education Committee and is a member of three other committees dealing with Technology, Environmental Affairs, and Financial Institutions.

So Joe has years of experience supporting churches that try to affect social change through state government and serving in state government as it tries to work with these churches. Perfect. I asked him if he'd share some time and ideas with us as the Furfey Lecturer. Knowing how busy he is and that only a handful of us Purdue people can vote for him, I was thrilled when Joe agreed to do this. So please welcome Joe Micon, who is going to talk to us about "*Limestone Prophets: Gauging the Effectiveness of Religious Political Action Organizations upon State Legislatures.*"