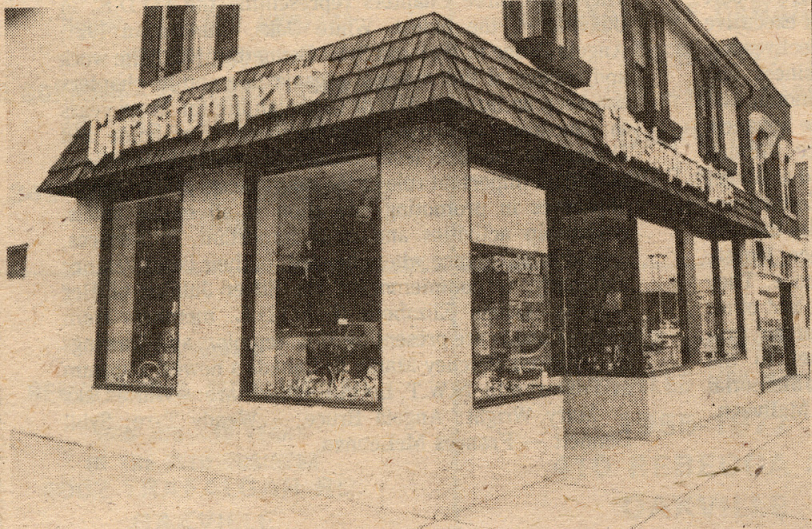


## Preaching the gospel top priority

# Church progresses but its major role is unchanged

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By AL MacRURY  
Since the beginning of civilization man has always looked for a god — something in which he could believe, something on which he could pin his hopes and even his fears.

In modern North American society, Christianity is recognized as the predominant faith, but one can choose to be a member of the Roman Catholic, Baptist, Presbyterian, Anglican, Lutheran or United churches.

The above are the major denominations, but Oakville, like most other communities has many lesser known churches such as the Christian Reform Church or the Church of the Nazarene.

We also have a Pentecostal church, a Polish National Catholic church and the Beth-El Congregation Synagogue.

In all, there are more than 30 churches in Oakville.

Over the years, the major role of the church has always been to preach the gospel but as society changes, the church, like everything else, must adapt in order to be socially relevant.

"Our role today is what it has always been," says Rev. Ian Dingwall of St. Jude's Anglican Church on William Street.

"What really changes is the sociological framework in which the church operates. The church must interpret and translate its message in contemporary language," Rev. Dingwall says.

But the church's basic role is still, and always will be, to understand, experience and articulate the gospel, he adds.

The church is also more aware of its "prophetic role" in today's society, Rev. Dingwall says. One of the main strengths of Western Civilization has been its ability to criticize its own actions. The church must act as a critic of social injustices — it must be compassionate and concerned.

Years ago people had a very strong sense of the community, and the church played an important part in their community, says Rev. James Campbell of St. John's United Church on Dunn Street.

Today, for many people there is no sense of the community, Rev. Campbell says, and that enables the church to make a unique contribution to society.

"Twenty years ago people agreed on standards of life," he says. "Whether they went to church or not they knew what was right and what was wrong. Today the church is one of few institutions that can provide a sense of that right and wrong."

"The church can give people standards to judge the world around them with," Rev. Campbell says.

He also notes that more people are turning to church, and congregations are getting younger. On any given week, more people attend church than any sports event, or any entertainment event.

Father Pucci of St. James Parish on Morden Road agrees that the role of the church — giving man hope for salvation

and a purpose in his life — has not changed.

Despite the spread of secularism and the belief by some members of the clergy that the church must fight against inequality, indiscriminate warring, and poverty in the Third World, the role of the church remains the same — preaching the gospel.

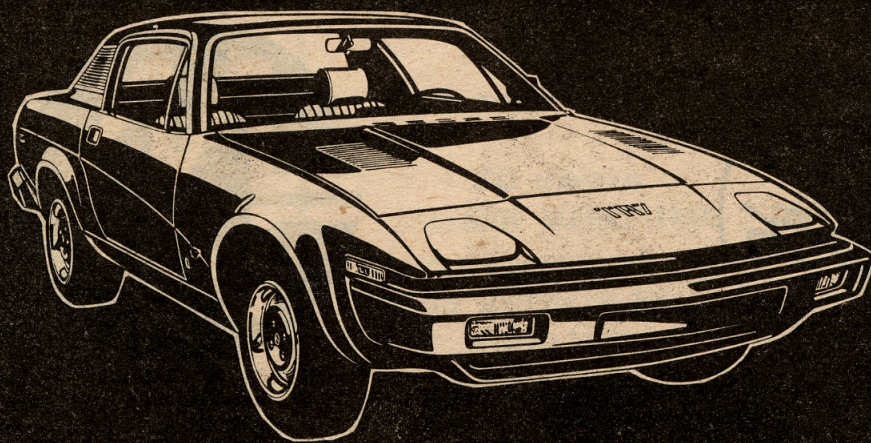
The church musn't remove itself from God, Father Pucci said, but it must bring God closer to the people. Sometimes methods for bringing religion to the people must change to suit the times, but the teachings of Jesus Christ never change.

Man is always seeking salvation, he's always striving to find meaning to his life, he said. The church can help give him that meaning.



St. John's United Church minister Rev. James Campbell  
Photo by BILL MAJESKY

## THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME



# TR7

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### From our files

## Early fires disastrous

Most of the buildings of early Oakville were of wood, and the citizens lived in dread of fire. All they had for protection was a small hand pump and a short length of hose with which to draw water from wells and cisterns. Merchants would place their cash-boxes and small valuables, protected by heavy covering, under their beds each night.

In 1854 the first fire-engine was purchased. It cost 100 pounds, which was raised by a special assessment of a quarter-of-a-penny in the pound. The next year extra hose was

purchased for 50 pounds.

The engine, known as the Cataract, was kept in one end of the old schoolhouse that was altered for the purpose. A fire company of 45 volunteers was formed and provided with uniforms.

Fire alarms were sounded on the bell of St. Jude's Church, which at that time stood on Colborne Street (Lakeshore Road) at the corner of Thomas Street.

When the alarm was sounded the firemen would pull out the engine, attach it to the first wagon that came along and drive

it to the fire. Boys would take turns at working the pump.

A bylaw to prevent fires in the town stated that "No person shall carry fire through any of the streets, squares or courtyards in said town, except in some covered vessel or metal fire pan."

It provided that each flue in every "house, shop or office be well and effectively swept every three months." The bylaw embodied many other regulations concerning fire prevention, some of which were almost impossible to enforce.