

Furey breaks out with stained glass



By PAUL BENEDETTI
The Spectator

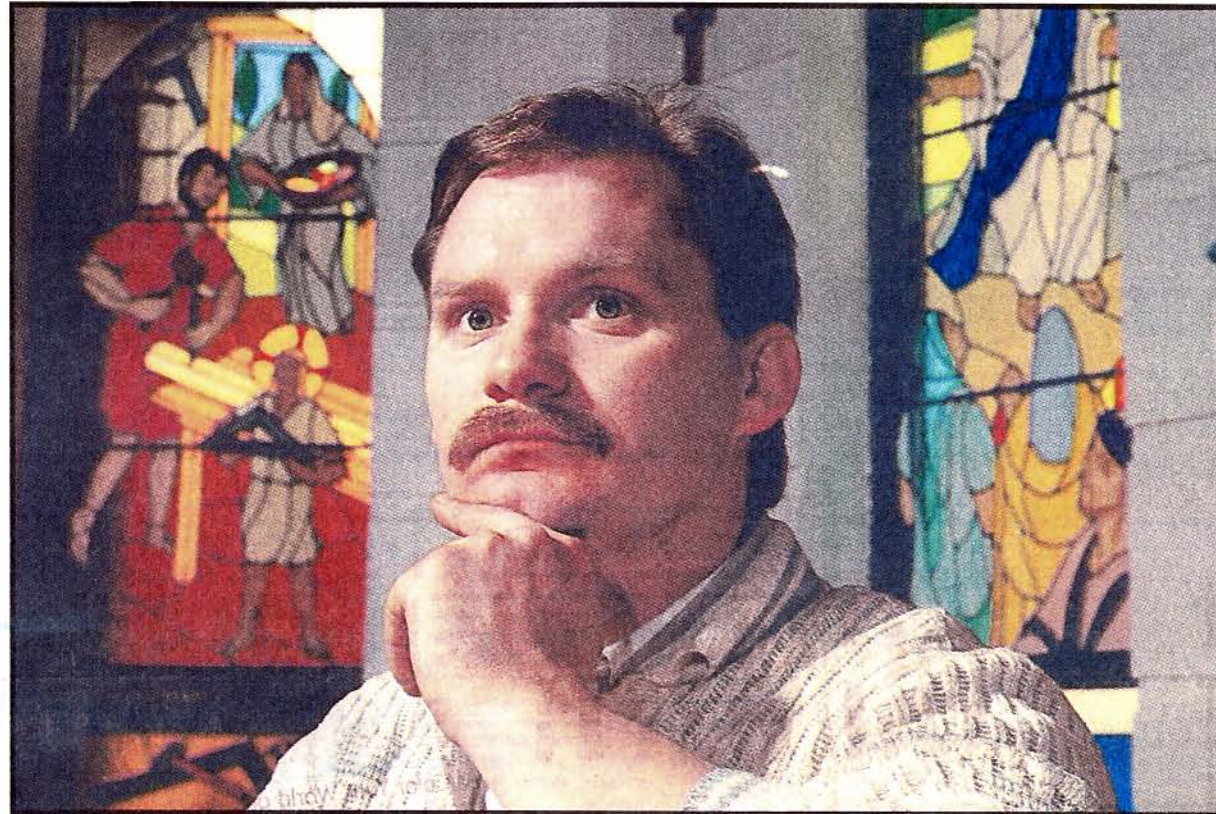
IF YOU know Hamilton artist Conrad Furey's work, the idea of him doing stained glass windows for a church might seem a little odd.

It's hard to imagine his child-like figures in rowboats adorning the walls of a place of worship.

But Furey only smiles at the comment. As an artist, it's just another challenge. "I don't want to be restricted," said the 34-year-old Newfoundland native.

Furey just completed a set of 13 stained-glass windows, each 90 inches (2.28 metres) high and 30 inches (76 centimetres) across, for St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church in Oakville. They depict a series of scenes from the New Testament.

The job was an enormous one and a big departure for Furey. He had, a few years ago, designed the stations of the cross for a church in St. John's, Newfoundland. He did the works in his own particular style of bas-relief — a kind of three-dimensional painting using layers of wood — which were a success.



□ Conrad Furey in St. Michael's Catholic Church, with some of his windows in the background. Above left and right, two of 13 windows he created.

"You get some resistance to change ... but they've grown on them. They're still up," he said, laughing.

This latest project came about when Father Peter Coughlin of St. Michael's asked him to consider the assignment.

Last year Furey had painted a large (28 foot by 8 foot) mural of St. Michael for the back wall of the church. Reaction to the mural was good and the priest contacted him about doing the windows.

"I like Conrad's work," said Father Coughlin, who presided over Furey's wedding at St. Patrick's in Hamilton. "He did the main mural

and I really liked that ... (We had) almost a total positive response to it."

Though Furey is not known for stained glass, he has developed a reputation for versatility. In his downtown Hamilton studio on Main Street East, he is surrounded by evidence of his flexibility — paintings, drawings, bas relief pieces, and wood sculptures.

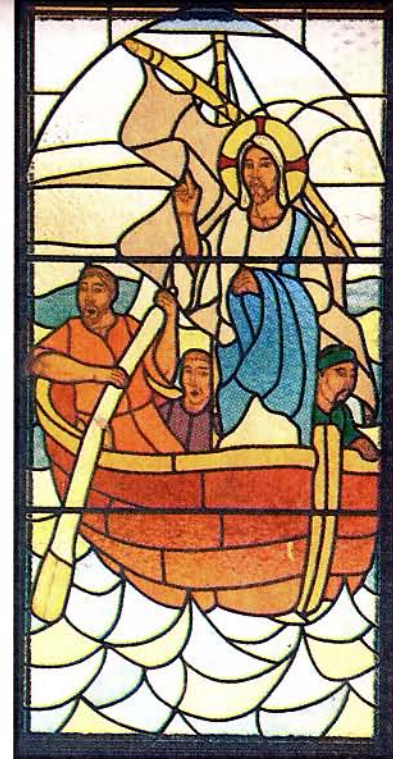
He pulls out a stack of photographs. They show busts of four Newfoundland premiers cast in bronze and executed in a very realistic style, nothing like the usual style of Furey's paintings. He shrugs off the difference, saying a trained artist

should be able to work realistically. Whether he chooses to is another matter.

"My other things offer more flexibility (of expression)." They are destined to be displayed in the Confederation Building in St. John's, and may, Furey said, promote other commissions.

His windows should do the same. Brightly colored, simply but skillfully composed and drawn, they are a refreshing change from the somewhat repetitive and studied windows that adorn most churches.

The scenes — Christ calming the storm, the Sermon on the Mount,



Christ healing a boy — are done with large, simple figures, but with an attention to detail, particularly in the faces.

Furey explains that stained glass craftspeople Rob and Evelyn Stewart worked from Furey's paintings to produce the leaded windows, but the faces and other detailed areas were handled by the artist himself.

Working on a light table with the pieces of glass, Furey hand-painted the features in with special paint and then fired them in his own kiln at home.

He began work on the project in December and completed the windows this month.

Each window, including the two bottom panels, weighed more than 100 pounds, and had to be carefully transported in wooden cribs to the church. Furey helped with the installation.

Father Coughlin said he has plans for Furey to do several more windows for other areas of the church.

"I would definitely go with the same style ... They are excellent ... I think in doing the stained glass work, Conrad outdid himself," the priest said.