

CATHOLICISM IS CHANGING TO ATTRACT INACTIVE MEMBERS BACK TO THE CHURCH

Back to the fold

BY MIKE ADLER
Staff Writer

Maura Goguen had been away from the Catholic Church for 30 years. She went to a Catholic school, but when she moved in Grade 7, her new Catholic school wasn't the same.

Her father still took Goguen and her siblings to church, but she didn't know anyone and the priest was speaking Latin.

"There was nothing for youth, nothing for teenagers. It was boring to go to church," the Markham resident recalled last week.

"We all just drifted away, my father included. We all just got involved in other things."

Lina D'Onofrio was brought up Catholic and taught by nuns, but since coming to Canada from Australia in 1990, she stopped going to church. "Throughout my adult years it became a low priority for me," she said.

But D'Onofrio has recently started going to church at St. Patrick's in Markham, where Goguen sings in the folk group Sunday at noon mass.

The women are back because active Catholics in their parish offer a chance to "ease back in" to the Church through a program called Landings.

Over 10 weeks, a group of three inactive Catholics meets with six to eight churchgoers. They share stories and try to relate experiences with the Church as friends or neighbours — ordinary people.

One thing stressed is that Catholicism, itself, is different.

It's not the fear of God anymore, it's the love of God.

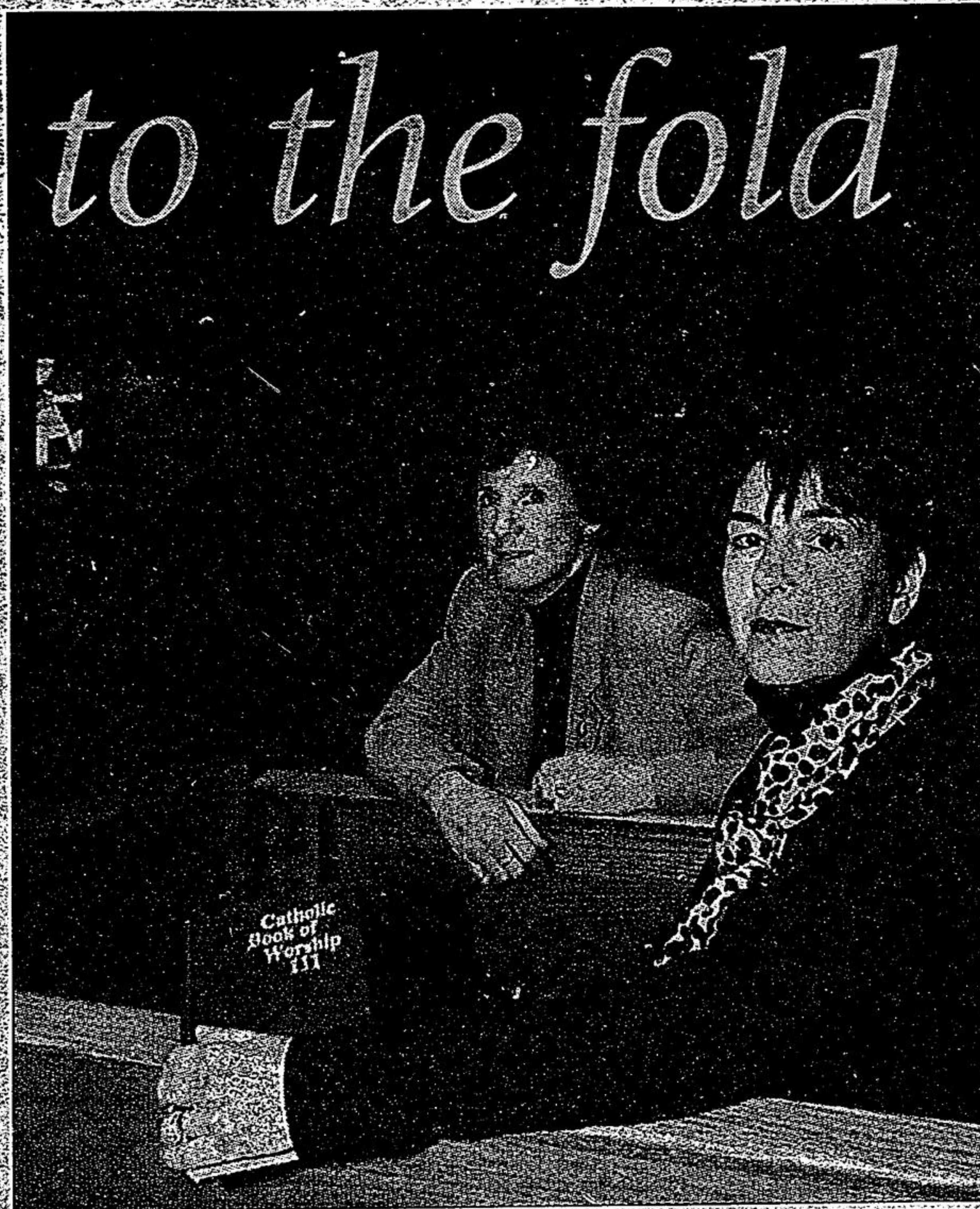
"Pre-Vatican II (the Second Vatican Council, whose reforms dropped the Latin mass in favour of the vernacular) we did what we were told," said Mary Matthews, a parish volunteer in the Landings program. "After Vatican II, we got a sense that we are (the) Church."

D'Onofrio, who had her first Landings meeting recently, found the rules of the Church that bothered her had changed.

"The fear," as she called it, was no longer there.

There's none of that (fear) anymore, which I was amazed to see, because that's what you remember as a child," agreed Goguen, who was in the program last year. "It's not the fear of God anymore, it's the love of God."

When he blessed the chapel at



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Trena Finnegan (left) and Kristina Marks are among the organizers of Landings, a program that offers lapsed Catholics a way to ease back in to the Church, at St. Patrick's Church.

Brother Andre Catholic High School last week, Anthony Meagher, auxiliary bishop of Toronto, brought that message of love. Everyone is unique, he said, and Jesus speaks to each heart differently.

"Jesus is keeping his promise of being right with us."

This month, the Pope himself apologized for the Church's historic wrongs against women, heretics and followers of other religions.

Trena Finnegan, a member of St. Patrick's who calls inactive Catholics the second biggest denomination in the world, acknowledged people have had different reasons for leaving the Church.

There is marriage outside the faith, or divorce and remarriage. "Some people get angry, a priest said something," said Finnegan, or else felt the priest wasn't around when there was an illness in the family.

Landings is in many North American churches. St. Mark's in Stouffville will be trying it this fall.

And the program is off the ground at St. Mary Immaculate in Richmond Hill, helping people thinking of returning come to grips with what bothers them about the Church, according to parish volunteer Joe D'Amico.

The Catholic Church can seem mammoth, he added, and the program shows its human face.

"We're not a bunch of evangelists, we're just regular people," D'Amico said this week.

St. Mary Immaculate and St. Patrick's have many more worshippers than they can hold at once.

Kristina Marks, who welcomes new parishioners at St. Patrick's, believes it could be overwhelming to walk inside and not know anyone.

Her first time there on Sunday, D'Onofrio — although she had been welcomed by friendly people — felt a bit nervous and thought, "They're all looking at me."

Landings isn't a refuge for the troubled, she added. People said, "Why are you doing this? Are you ill?"

It was just the right time, D'Onofrio said.

Last year, Goguen went to the reconciliation service at St. Patrick's before Easter and found that sitting with a priest in confession, face to face and out in the open, didn't bother her. She felt good afterwards.

"It was a great burden off my shoulders," she said.



Joan Ransberry

Klees must rip up PC membership

My MPP should resign. If Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees wants to run Canada, he should start by filing for a divorce from the Progressive Conservatives.

With no help from me, last summer Oak Ridges voters elected Klees on a PC ticket.

Voters thought nothing of it: Klees looked like a Tory, talked like a Tory and, as far as anyone knew, was a Tory. Ontario liked Mike Harris, they liked the PCs.

Oh, what a difference a year makes. While Ontario still loves Mike and his PCs, Klees is having an identity crisis: The man doesn't know if he's a priest or a rabbi.

Recently, Klees criss-crossed the country, making all kinds of noise about wanting to be the prime minister of Canada by leading the new federal Canadian Alliance party. While Klees was testing the waters and checking the financial cost of soaring to the top, he was supposed to be representing my interests at Queen's Park.

When the Reform Party folded to make way for the new CA, I couldn't help but ask: who is this party allied with? Let's look at the options.

PC leader Joe Clark has made it clear the CA is no friend of his. Clark's not giving up the flagship, despite the fact that in the past two years, his party's membership plummeted to 11,000 from a high of 90,000.

When the Reform Party killed itself, it had 75,000 members. As soon as the death certificate was issued, CA officials figured every member of the Reform Party switched over.

While I've heard nothing to the contrary, I can only assume the Canadian Alliance is not about to marry the New Democratic Party. Opposites attract, but not that much.

And, the chances of convincing the Liberals to wipe the smug smiles from their faces, take off the crown and drop the reigns to Canada is too bizarre to think about.

The CA is not targeting PC leader Joe Clark. Instead, the new party's sights are set clearly on the PC membership. The CA will raid the Conservative camp, expecting federal Tories to jump ship en masse, leaving Joe on deck all alone.

I know lots of Tories. Under no circumstances will they leave. Party loyalty is a very real thing. They are committed to the Conservative philosophy. These long-standing Tories will not jump in bed with Preston, Stockwell or Frank Klees. I wish the party brass and, yes, some politicians would learn to be as faithful.

I have no problem with the Reform Party changing its name. Nor do I object to Klees wanting to lead the new-name party. Yet, when Oak Ridges voted, it elected a PC. When marking the ballot, Oak Ridges wasn't voting for a Liberal, a New Democrat or a Reformer. Nor was Oak Ridges giving a guy a job until a better offer came along.

If, in Klees' heart and soul, he feels he's more suited to the CA than to the PCs, then fine. He should resign and then go for it.



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