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BELIEF AND BELONGING: A CASE STUDY OF THE MARONITES  
IN SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

by

ROSE BASHARA KARAM

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the University of the Incarnate Word  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF THE INCARNATE WORD

May 2021

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to begin this work with a brief statement of my place within this study. I identify as a third-generation Lebanese American Catholic. I am married to a second-generation Lebanese American Catholic. I was born in Austin to a Maronite Lebanese father and non-Lebanese mother. Although this study has participants from the San Antonio Maronite Church, I do not identify with any particular Maronite parish or its membership. The stories I will report are not my stories, and although my position might suggest otherwise, I do not speak for them. The experiences participants share are their own, and the analysis is based on their stories, not mine. As a Lebanese American, I feel the need to start a conversation on the value of this ethnic church and other similar churches that add to our multicultural society's history and formation.

I would like to thank my family for their continued support and encouragement. I would like to express appreciation to Dr. Alfredo Ortiz-Aragon, Dr. Scott Roberts, and Dr. Sharon Herbers for the valuable and supportive suggestions throughout the research process. And finally, I would like to thank the participants of this study for their contributions of time and the sharing their stories that made this study notable. To all those who have been alongside of me during this process I am deeply appreciative and thankful.

Rose Bashara Karam

## DEDICATION

To my parents

Joseph and Myrtle Bashara

My husband

J. Raymond Karam

And my children

Myrtle, Frances, Martha, Elias and Kathleen

Without their encouragement and support this work would not have been possible.

## BELIEF AND BELONGING: A CASE STUDY OF THE MARONITES IN SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

Rose Bashara Karam, PhD

University of the Incarnate Word, 2021

This study focuses on a religious group in America and how it has managed to engage the third and fourth generations who have assimilated into the American cultural milieu while maintaining allegiance to the Church of Lebanon-the Maronite Catholic church.

Most of these individuals in this study are the descendants of the early Lebanese Christian immigrants who arrived in America nearly a century ago. The first wave of these immigrants came at the turn of the 20th century as a result of religious persecution, economic stagnation, and regional discrimination against the Christians in Lebanon during the Ottoman regime. As a means of preserving their cherished religious beliefs in America, Maronite Catholic Churches established to provide both a place for spiritual worship and secular culture renewal for the Lebanese communities across America. The Maronite Church struggles with providing a place of prayer and renewal through the celebration of the Eucharist and with the image of being merely a secular institution of heritage. This study examines the relationship between the Maronite Church as an ethnic Eastern-rite Church and the identity formation and maintenance of Lebanese Americans affiliated with the Maronite Church in San Antonio, Texas. The study offers a greater understanding of the Maronite rite and its role in the Lebanese communities and adds to the body of knowledge in this field of study.

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Khalil Gibran, a Lebanese American poet of the early 20th century, writes of the vehemence oppression endured by Lebanese Maronites during the Ottoman regime during the mid-late 19th century. Gibran's poem is a poignant reflection of the resulting exodus of the Lebanese Christians and the Maronite rite to America. The plight of their ancestors remains part of the Lebanese American immigrant story from which much of the successive generations' folklore derives. For many this journey made by the first arrivals is part of the shared history that has created a strong sense of identity and solidarity among the subsequent generations.

### Dead are my People

My people died from hunger, and he who  
 Did not perish from starvation was  
 Butchered with the sword; and I am  
 Here in this distant land, roaming  
 Amongst a joyful people who sleep  
 Upon soft beds, and smile at the days  
 While the days smile upon them.

My people died on the cross....  
 They died while their hands  
 Stretched toward the East and West,  
 While the remnants of their eyes  
 Stared at the blackness of the  
 Firmament...They died silently,  
 For humanity had closed its ears

To their cry. They died because  
 They did not befriend their enemy.  
 They died because they loved their  
 Neighbors. They died because  
 They placed trust in all humanity.  
 They died because they did not  
 Oppress the oppressors. They died  
 Because they were the crushed  
 Flowers, and not the crushing feet.  
 They died because they were peace  
 Makers.

## **Chapter I: A Study of the Maronite Rite and its Followers**

This study examines the Maronite Rite Catholic Church in San Antonio and the reasons for continued engagement at this religious institution among third and fourth generation Lebanese Americans. These individuals at this generational level have assimilated into the cultural milieu of America while maintaining allegiance to the Church of Lebanon, the Maronite Church. This study's sample are descendants of an immigration group that arrived in America over a century ago and brought with them a religious identity tied to their cultural heritage, the Maronite faith. Although assimilation has occurred, the lingering significance of sacred and secular culture has remained equally relevant among this selected population, evident in the continued relevance of the Maronite Church in this town, St. George Maronite Catholic Church. The intense desire to preserve this heritage expressed through religious participation and community building centered on this faith-based community is how the individual reveals their ethnic identity in a meaningful manner, the acceptance and maintenance of the ethnic self-tied to the Maronite faith.

Understanding the heritage of the Church will aid in comprehending the importance of this Church among this population and the manner which binds the community as Lebanese American. This study focuses on a religious group in America and how it has managed to engage the third and fourth generations who have assimilated into the American cultural milieu while maintaining allegiance to the Church of Lebanon-the Maronite Catholic church. Understanding the history of the Lebanese American people and their connection to this Church is essential when studying this group because it offers a deep awareness of the existing phenomena in America, the natural progression of an immigrant population, and its subsequent generation's progression into the American society. Founded upon the knowledge that there is unity through

diversity, this study promotes the understanding of the respective value of all citizens in American society, such as this minority group and its religious institution.

### **Sociohistorical Background**

America's history is shaped by its diverse people who have traveled from foreign lands to make a new life in its society. Many of these immigrant groups have their own set of values, customs, and norms often shaped by their religious belief systems. To deal with the vast numbers of various ethnic groups arriving during the late 19th century, the expectation that the immigrants would assimilate to the host society for continuity and, in turn, would be accepted into the society and receive all its benefits offer (Gordon, 1961). The expectation was that over the generations, adaption to the host country would eliminate the need to hold onto old norms and customs that tied to their ethnic heritage, and they would adapt to the new country's societal norms (Gordon, 1961). A society that looked dressed, spoke, and worshiped in the same way as a unified society. Abandonment of a person's ethnicity was the only option available to the immigrant attempting to survive in the host society and receive impartiality. Although this concept of imposed assimilation has curbed over the decades, it continues to linger in society implicitly for many new arrivals. Today, the very concept of assimilation has become open to reconsideration upon the increased awareness of the need for diversity and acceptance in a pluralistic society. The term assimilation has fallen out of favor in the current American sociological lexicon because it devalued minority cultures to promote Anglo-American culture (Horowitz, 2004). A resurgence of ethnic awareness began in the late 20th century among the successive generations desiring to reconnect to their ancestral past to gain a better understanding of their uniqueness in the greater American society founded on the knowledge that there is unity in diversity.

Adjacent to the concept of assimilation is the expectation of the abandonment of not only cultural differences in dress, language, and behavior, but also of varied ethno- religious traditions and practices when applicable. Religious assimilation is the adaption of the majority religious belief system and norms by the minority or the subgroup. In the past, many immigrant populations willingly abandoned their distinct religious practices and beliefs in their pursuit to fit into society. This alteration of the religious behaviors was un-intrusive for many groups, while other groups experienced a more significant burden when their religious practices were deeply rooted in their identity (Ozdil, 2007). For some religious groups, abandoning their belief system and worship practices necessitates rejection of their cultural bonds and self-denial. This rediscovery of ethnic individuality extends to a renewed awareness of diverse religious belief systems and the rejection of religious assimilation's intolerable expectations. In meeting the needs of the individual wishing to retain their ethnic-religious institutions in America, ethnic churches were established by the immigrant populations wishing to retain their belief system, and worship practices brought with them from their homelands.

Ethnic churches bring abundant cultural elements to our society, offering places of worship that are meaningful to those seeking an understanding of their heritage through their faith. These churches established by the immigrant populations are often transitional and lose relevancy with the subsequent generations who are no longer able to identify with the ethnic institutions that were held onto by their parents and grandparents. Due to the transitional nature of ethnic churches, there is little resolve to understand and promote their existence. This dismissal of ethnic churches and their populations demonstrated in the limited amount of literature and studies which focus on the role of such institutions retain in American society. One

such ethnoreligious population comprises the Maronite, followers of an Eastern rite of the Catholic Church brought to America by Lebanese immigrants over a century ago.

The Maronite faith was a statement of nationality and identity as Christian immigrants, arriving from lands dominated by the Ottoman Empire, and ingrained in their identity formation as Americans (Harik, 1987). Their faith was befitting to their human character and dignity as Lebanese. The exile from their lands was a traumatic event, but the comfort of their families and faith brought great comfort to these newcomers in a drastically different foreign land. It was essential to continue to practice the faith-based traditions and practices of their Maronite ancestry even in their new lands (Sennot, 2001). This group brought their treasured Maronite faith and immediately upon arrival began establishing churches that would allow them to worship in a manner which they identified with, and that would preserve their Lebanese heritage as Americans (Kayal, 1973; Naff, 1993). For this group of immigrants, there was no distinction between the ethnic culture and religious heritage, for it is the symbiosis of the two that has created a collective identity that has lasted throughout the generations. These Maronite Churches established by the early arrivals were not transitional, whereas the continued awareness of self through religious practices remains very relevant among the subsequent Lebanese populations. The Lebanese people's secure and constant attachment to this Church has resulted in a longer and less developed religious assimilation among the following generations (Naff, 1993).

The Maronite Church's role as a religious institution is that of spiritual leadership by providing spiritual guidance and renewal through the celebration of the Eucharist (Labaki, 2014). It is the church mission to serve this global congregation in an appropriate and relatable manner. Since the beginning of the establishment of Maronite Churches in America, the Eastern Rite has struggled in its duty to pay attention to the heritage celebration and temporal character without

sacrificing or overpowering the religious character of the Church (Labaki, 2014). Addressing the issue of assimilation of the faithful and the rigidity of its ecumenical heritage, the Church may need to reexamine its role and importance in the lives of the faithful overseas who have integrated into the cultural milieu of America. In the Church's arduous attempt to preserve the faith and keep it relevant for the successive generations, isolated from the motherland with time and space, there is a concerted effort to remain appropriate as spiritual guidance for its worldwide congregation as it strives for continued viability outside of Lebanon. The Maronite Church, caught between preserving its sacred heritage and seeking to establish itself among the faithful in a society that radically differs from where it was founded, strives to remain relevant without losing its identity (Labaki, 2014). Over the years, as a reaction to serving worshipers living in a culturally different society than the one in which the faith is based, the Church has moved towards being a relevant cultural institution for ethnic affirmation. Geographically and culturally far removed from its motherland and its sacred heritage, the Maronite Church in America often struggles with the duality of being a secular institution of cultural renewal and being the spiritual leader for its dispersed congregation that lives in a culturally different society. A greater understanding of the Maronite Church's role in the lives of its members promotes clarity on the value given to this ethnic-religious institution and the population that it serves that will lead to its longevity as a meaningful experience for its members.

It is difficult to comprehend a full appreciation of ethnic churches in a society that strives for homogeneity. Throughout American history, the goal has been the elimination of ethnicity and distinctly unique ethnic -religious practices in the pursuit of oneness (Herberg, 1973). Despite lip service to the concept of cultural pluralism over the past several decades, there is a fundamental ambivalence towards different ethnic groups and religious belief systems in our society. The



ideal notion of a common culture is not a correct position when striving for cultural pluralism, for although in the appearance of sameness is evident among many assimilated groups, an underlying sense of individualism remains, often expressed through the retention of ethnic identity through religious practices. In examining ethnic-religious groups, it is beneficial to understand differences in their ideas, affections, mores, and historical experiences that make them noteworthy subjects of study on their self-identification as Americans.

The Maronite Church in San Antonio, established nearly a century ago, continues to provide a place for the Lebanese to worship in a relevant manner. As such, this study's objective is to examine the underlying influences on a continued engagement in this Church to provide valuable data relating to its continued preservation when addressing the challenges of a changing population. This study examined community members with the intended goal to discover the reasons for continued loyalty to an ethnoreligious institution as fully integrated Americans. This study focuses on a population that is rarely examined, assimilated successive generations that have not abandoned their ethnic identity while retaining status as Americans, and offers insight into their existence through the lens of a sacred character.

### **Problem Statement**

From a purely functional perspective, religious institutions are structured organizations that facilitate the transmission of beliefs, spirituality, values, moral attributes, and norms in the society that they serve. In this study, the religious institution of interest, the Maronite Rite Catholic Church, serves a worldwide population that transcends the boundaries of many societies where the Lebanese Diasporas reside. The spiritual seat of this Catholic rite remains firmly in Lebanon, and the Church has reached out beyond its border to serve its worldwide congregation living in different societies (Leichtman, 2013). The fact that the Maronite Church is spiritually

rooted in the Lebanese culture raises the issue of the relevance of the role it plays for the diaspora living in America. The Maronite faith cannot be practiced in a vacuum; it relies heavily on the existence of the cultural milieu, both Lebanese and American, in which it exists. This Eastern Rite is rooted in Lebanon's culture, serving the Lebanese Catholics for many centuries undisturbed. Although it flourished for centuries within the mountainous regions of Lebanon, expansion occurred with its faithful immigration, resonating in a worldwide congregation. As a result, the faith heritage is inescapably connected to the culture of its people living overseas. By loose definitions and by all practical purposes, it is the Church of Lebanon, yet at this point in history, most of its congregants reside outside of Lebanon. This Eastern rite does not hold the same customs, practices, and traditions of the typical religious institutions found within America and, as a result, face the greatest struggle in relevancy among the continuing integrated population. The challenges that face this ethnic church are similar to those encountered by other ethnic-religious institutions. These issues include limited clergy from the homelands, scattered populations that no longer live in predominantly ethnic communities, the threat to its sacred identity, the loss of traditions so to appeal to a mass audience, and the retention of its uniqueness as part of the more abundant Catholic Church (Latin Rite) that is dominant in American society (Labaki, 2014). While most ethnic faith-based communities become obsolete by the second or third generation due to ethnic disconnects (Herberg, 1973; Hirschman, 2004), this Maronite community has successfully retained its relevance among its third and fourth generation, Lebanese American congregants. As future generations claim America as their native home and abandon their ethnic identity, identifying with this ethnic Church is questionable. This examined group of Lebanese American Maronite continues to partake in the sacred religious practices and traditions that many generations remove. This work examined the relevance among congregants

exposed to a very different culture than the one in which the faith is rooted. Discovering the underlying influences that continue to engage loyal congregants far removed from Lebanon to this distinctive ethnic Church will contribute to an increased understanding of the Lebanese American religious and cultural identity formation.

The impact of ethnoreligious practices and identification among Middle Eastern Christians in America is relatively uncharted in the academic field of study. Other than the sporadic research on the Middle Eastern Christian assimilation process that occurred at the turn of the 20th century (Kayal, 1973; Kayal & Kayal, 1975; Konrad, 2012; Naff, 1993), the academic literature has scarcely mentioned the impact of this group's insistence on preserving its ancestral heritage through its religious practices. As such, there is little literature to add to the current scholarly understanding of this group and similar groups striving to preserve sacred and cultural heritage in America. Understanding the interrelation of ethnicity and religious beliefs that are culturally transmitted to subsequent generations is an area of study that has received attention in the academic field over the past decade yet has fallen short in the area of Arab Christianity. The lack of research in this area of study seems peculiar, considering that religion plays such an influential role in shaping the identity of this ethnic group worldwide. This noticeable lack of literature might be attributed to the fact that the early Lebanese Christian immigrants were known for their rapid assimilation, absorption, and adoption of their host country's ways to gain the economic and social advantages afforded by inclusion. The Lebanese were so successful in Americanization that they have become non-distinctive in areas of study relating to assimilation and identity over the past decades (Kayal, 1973).

Although most individuals of Lebanese descent have assimilated with ease in American secular and sacred society, a small minority of Lebanese have sought to maintain and preserve a

part of their distinct heritage through their religious affiliation to the Maronite Church. These adults, who were born into American society and are members of the Church by birth, continue their active practice of faith in the Church of their ancestors and do so by choice. This select population in America, and within the Catholic Church, is small, it remains worthy of study. It is an example of individuality within a society that strives for homogeny, a statement of the value ethnic churches hold in our society and among its congregants. Understanding the reasons for this choice would add to the scholarly knowledge of the connection between religion and ethnicity that has been overlooked in most research. The limited studies on ethnicity often fall short in the areas of ethnic-religious practices and the impact on the development of self-identity. This study will add to the literature on ethnicity and religion with the examination of a minority group- the Lebanese American Maronite Catholics- by exploring the ethnic group and its ancestral religious practices as a salient means of identity formation.

The topic addressed by this study is how the Maronite Church established by immigrants continues to maintain relevancy among the Americanized subsequent generation of Lebanese Americans. The life cycle of other ethnic churches suggests that an ethnic church purpose is offering support to the immigrant population during the integration process into the American society and, as such, is transitory in nature. The fact that these churches become obsolete among subsequent generations who no longer can identify with their ethnic culture or institutions is a concerning fact that needs addressing. Although this church has proven to meet the needs of the third and fourth generations, there is a strong possibility that the following generations who are more Americanized will not be able to have the same level of commitment and allegiance to this ethnic church of their fathers and grandfathers. Whereas other ethnic-religious institutions have adapted their ethnic-religious identity to meet the changing needs of a subsequent generation

congregation to remain relevant, this option is not available to this rite, which is rigid in its theological teachings and liturgical traditions. Understanding that the Maronite Church is unable to change or make major adaptations places it in a precarious position to remain relevant for future generations. The one course of action would be to identify the motivators of the current congregation of subsequent generation American Lebanese to determine strengths and weaknesses that exist and approach change systematically and logically to continue to be attractive as a religious institution in San Antonio.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the sustainability of the Maronite Church's essence as a unique bounded institution for the successive Lebanese American generations. Exploring the reasons for continued engagement among individuals who have fully integrated into American society will add to the understanding of the relevance of the Church and other churches that face similar challenges. In the fact that this religious institution's goal is to be able to meet the spiritual needs of the members, it must align the church needs with the needs of its congregation to assure its longevity. The complexity of needs requires agreement on the direction of the church from both the leaders and the members. If there is a misalignment between the two elements, sustainability might not be certain.

As a Lebanese American with limited exposure to the Maronite Church, I feel that it is a noteworthy study to pursue; not only from a personal perspective but also for an academic value it can add to the field of study relating to ethnic-religious institutions in America. Too often ethnic, religious institutions are pushed aside with vagueness of study, ignoring the functionalist function it has for the individual and groups. Preserving the Church in America is beneficial on many social and religious levels, and for this reason understanding the factors that influence

continued engagement will add to a greater understanding of its relevance that can be transferred to other ethnic churches across America seeking to retain relevance among a changing population. Numerous studies pulled for this work have looked at the life cycle of the ethnic church as a transitional phenomenon among the immigrant population utilized for support during the integration period (Chen & Park, 2019; Chong, 1997; Herberg, 1973; Hirschman, 2004; Kayal, 1973; Lazarwitz & Rowitz, 1964; Mullins, 1987; Nelsen & Allen, 1974; Portes & Zhou, 1993). These studies focused on the continued role of the ethnic churches established by the immigrant population and how the impact of assimilation among the following generations can impact the relevance of these religious institutions among the changing population. These studies acknowledge the value of the ethnic church but accept the fact that most churches lose their relevancy among the changed population that no longer identifies with the ethnicity of the church or their ancestors. If the church does not address the changing needs of the congregation, it will face extinction. However, if the religious institution adapts along with the population, continued viability might be assured (Herberg, 1973; Kayal, 1973; Mullins, 1987). With subsequent generations, the need to adapt along with the subsequent generations to remain relevant, at the cost of losing ethnic identity, is necessary to avoid extinction.

The importance of the Eastern Rite is reflected in the meaning-making process for which the participants relate their experiences and feelings associated with the unique practices of the faith and membership in the faith-based community. The process of understanding includes the perceptions, emotions, desires, actions, and thoughts about the practices as it is experienced as a member derived from the narratives of its followers. Having a better understanding of the Maronite Church in America, as explored within this Texas Maronite Church, adds to the scholarly knowledge and conventional wisdom the importance of personal perspective and

interpretation of religious ideology as a strong influencer and motivator of individuals when constructing meaning through ethnoreligious practices. This will not only contribute to addressing the declining numbers of ethnic churches in America, but it addresses the spiritual needs of the changing population, ensuring the survival of the Maronite Church for many Lebanese American Catholics.

One means of understanding the phenomenon of the Maronite Church's sustained existence in San Antonio is to explore the reasons why the successive generations continue to place value on their engagement in this faith-based community. Lebanese Americans' loyal religious affiliation to this Maronite Church entails moving beyond their inherited membership to remain loyal adult members at the third and the fourth generational levels. Herberg's (1973) generation hypothesis is referred to as the standard on which an ethnic group's adjustment and integration in America is gauged as related to its participation in the religious activities specific to it. The general understanding is that by the third generation, there is full assimilation; thus, the individual becomes interested in religion from a more thoroughly Americanized perspective (Lazarwitz & Rowitz, 1964). By these generational levels, the reasonable assumption is that individuals would have abandoned their ethnic identity and ethnic-religious practices once they have fully embraced and thrived in American society. In his book, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*, Herberg (1973) argues that those who rejected their ethnic identification or felt uncomfortable with it transformed this rejection to the Church and religion of their immigrant parents. From this, it can be presumed that the second and the third generations' willingness to reject their ethnicity are attuned to their eagerness to reject the religion that they associate with it. This rejection of ethnicity and ethnic-religious practices is the considered outcome of the assimilation process and the most prevalent outcome of ethnic

groups' integration into the host society. This denunciation of the ethnic self inadvertently results in the expiry, of the ethnic churches (established by the immigrant population) by the second or the third generation (Mullins, 1987). Theoretically, subsequent generations have a propensity for abandoning their ethnic identity and, subsequently, its ethnic-religious practices, which make this site an exciting phenomenon, evident in that a high number of third- and fourth-generation Lebanese Americans are very active in the Maronite Church.

While other ethnic groups abandon their sacred ancestral heritage with their integration into the host society, this group has held on to its ethnic nationality and ideology that is no longer part of their reality as Americans. Religion is the binding element that appears to allow this group of subsequent generations to remain connected to their ethnicity through the saliency of the faith-based community. In San Antonio, it is of value to determine whether the Church has become a place for secular worship of heritage or has maintained its original value of offering a place of worship. When exploring the issue of sustainability, which can be discovered when questioning individuals about the motivators for attendance, this religious institution's importance lies in its ability to serve individuals and the group's needs if it wishes to move forward in a healthy and preparatory manner, understanding these needs as obligatory. Understanding the factors that influence engagement in this faith-based community will help develop a continuance plan for the Church as it looks to the future as the spiritual leader of an American congregation. This study answers the question of whether the phenomenon of the Maronite Church membership among third- and fourth-generation Lebanese Americans is based on the faith or the lifestyle of the participants. The answers to these questions, in turn, enable me to propose a general model that utilizes the knowledge gained from the study that relates to the influencing factors that promote or discourage engagement. This model can be used as a



tentative conceptual framework for understanding the strengths and the weaknesses explored in this study while maintaining its sacred integrity and relevance as an Eastern-rite church in America.

The concept of the sustainable church takes on meaning for this site as a religious institution seeking continued relevancy among an evolving population. As an institution, it helps individuals to facilitate spirituality in everyday life by offering guidance and leadership. By emphasizing spirituality through its liturgy and theological teachings, it impacts the moral development and behaviors of its members as Catholics. The goal of any sustainable institution is to continue to align the needs of the institution with the needs of the members. This church has sustained for nearly a century and has remained an essential part of the Lebanese community for San Antonio and surrounding areas. Its establishment was a statement of solidarity among the Lebanese immigrant to have a place to gather and worship as a community. This does not mean that the members of this church have not shaped the institution as they have evolved over the generations.

The church's relevance is multifaceted among this population, extending beyond the need for spirituality through attendance to being a place for ethnic renewal. As needs change, the expectation of the institution to readjust their purpose to be sustainable is key to its longevity as a viable institution. Although the community has evolved and integrated into the normative American culture, the sacred and secular needs of these individuals continue to be met by this religious institution. If the support given to the individuals does not respond with certainty to the church's priority needs, there is a possibility of the church not being able to support its mission. To define institutional sustainability, one has to know how to revive criteria defining normative expectations that the institution has to achieve to be sustainable. To discuss the viability of this

church in San Antonio, the needs of the members that support this church are identified to allow the church to address the needs in a manner that does not impede its mission and facilitate a plan that will achieve sustainability goals. When moving towards a cohesive future, the aim is to balance the social, cultural, and spiritual interest of all involved.

Relevancy is necessary for this church's continued success among this subsequent generation that makes up a large part of the church. Relevancy is a purposeful intent, as opposed to sustainability, which focuses on maintaining the status quo or merely surviving. This study aims to promote continued relevancy by understanding the services offered and the alignment to the needs of the Lebanese American Catholic. Relevancy has no set predetermined parameters, especially being that this church has actively remained viable throughout many generations and changing needs. The church has proven to be competent in addressing the changing needs of each generation by remaining relevant over these nine decades. I am confident that it will continue to hold onto its legitimacy with the proper attention given to balancing the intent of the church with the intent of its members. Providing a balance between the social ethnic celebration of heritage and the religious celebration of the faith will assure future generations' relevancy. The consideration of implementing a sustainability plan not only promotes relevancy but implies the institution is open to the evolved needs of the subsequent generation represented in this church membership. It demonstrates an attitude of proactive in meeting their interest when striving for completeness while achieving the goals of the institution. The plan's function is to utilize the feedback from the members and account for that various interests, which are noted in the data. The church's effectiveness rests in balancing the interest of both the institution and the followers in a manner that is beneficial to all.

## **Research Questions**

To understand the role of the Maronite church in San Antonio among the subsequent generations, it is necessary to look at what are the reasons for continued attendance at this ethnic church among the assimilated Lebanese American. The objective of this study is to reflect on the motivating factors of continued engagement to gain an understanding of what attracts these congregants to this faith-based community to aid the church in meeting its vision of being a religious institution that meets the complete needs of their community to assure continued viability. The answers to the questions posit by this study will provide an understanding of the Maronite in San Antonio, Texas and the influencing factors that promote loyalty to this church.

1. What factors influence third- and fourth-generation Lebanese Americans to engage and or disengage in the practice of the Maronite faith?
2. How can the Maronite Church address the challenges of growth while maintaining its sacred identity among the changing needs of its population?

## **Methodology**

This study will look at the motivators for continued affiliation at the Maronite Church as described by those who attend and are part of the faith-based community. This case study will focus on the ethnoreligious experience of attendance of Maronite rite, ideas, symbols, and institutional influences as established through the perceptions of selected adults within San Antonio. I deemed Constructivist Grounded Theory methodology to be an appropriate approach for this study because it allowed for perspectives and thoughts of the participant are to be heard as they live it (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This interpretive means of arriving at the explanation of this social process of engagement will support a narrative that has not been heard before this study. Understanding why this phenomenon occurs will lead to the answer relating to relevancy.

This involves careful and in-depth consideration of the nature of the case, the historical background, the physical setting, and other contextual factors specific to the study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The ideas that emerge from the data will tell the story of the Maronite in San Antonio and lead to greater clarity on what attracts these participants to the church and how these influences can be utilized when looking to the meeting the needs of the current congregant and future congregants.

I chose a case study as an excellent means of addressing and exploring sophisticated social and religious units distinct to the Maronite Church practices and traditions. The case objective offers an increased level of understanding of these phenomena as illuminated through the meaning-making that the participants give it, anchored in real-life activities and behaviors. To understand the reasons for continued attendance practices among successive generations as reflections of religious and/or cultural renewal among the sample population—third- and fourth-generation Lebanese Americans—it is necessary to study the phenomena from the standpoint of those who live it. Creswell (2003) defines a case study was conducted when a “researcher explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals” (p. 15).

It is through the examination of the constructs of historical, liturgical, and communal experience that a clear picture can be formulated, which will add to the knowledge of this enduring presence in this Eastern-rite Church in San Antonio. The focus will be on the ritual of the Maronite rite and the interconnectedness between the ecumenical experience and the community it serves. The objective is to capture personal and human dimensions of the experience of attendance as described by the young adult and how it is relevant to the individual within the social context of Maronite Church. This inquiry will be obtained in a systematic manner from which data will be gathered, analyzed, and interpreted. The purpose is to arrive at

and develop an explanation that is true to the chosen methodology. This entails that I, as a researcher, suspend any preconceived ideas, prejudices, and biases when encountering the phenomena. The intended goal of the church is to provide spiritual guidance, and it is this ecclesiastical experience that has created meaning for the participant's continued involvement. The perception of this phenomenon by the participants is the key to the study and the data collection and analysis process utilized will arrive at a better understanding of this phenomenon looking for patterns or themes as experienced by individuals through this interpretative methodology. The case consists of members of the Maronite Church in San Antonio, Texas, and Lebanese Americans living in San Antonio who do not attend the Church and are not members of this faith-based community. The inclusion of non-attending participants is intended to offer a varied perspective on what factors prevent active participation in this Church. Ideally, this work will be useful or taken as a foundation for future research and advance the field of knowledge in this area of study.

The Constructivist Grounded Theory approach tells a story about the Lebanese American people, the social processes of the community, and the situation of religious participation, which allows an inductive process of generating a new theory or explanation of the phenomena. Constructivism assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognizes the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims toward an interpretive understanding of subjects' meanings (Charmaz, 2006). The utilized sources are theoretical assumptions and data gathered from observations, surveys, questionnaires, and interviews to understand the social process of identity development through religious participation.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study's significance is multifaceted. Relevance is expressed at individual, institutional, societal, and global levels. A greater understanding of the importance of the Church in identity formation will lead to a better knowledge of oneself and one's dynamic behaviors at the individual level. This study gives a voice to a group of individuals who have made a conscious effort to preserve their heritage through their religious affiliation. It allows for an understanding self-consciousness through the complexity and subtleties of their perceptions, behaviors, and aspiration of being able to express their individuality in a manner that represents their true self expressed through their faith

At the institutional level, understanding the community's needs served by the Church will support its mission as a spiritual leader and a cultural gatekeeper. Understanding the community's needs supports the Maronite mission as a spiritual leader and addresses the expressed desires of the subsequent generations who rely on its presence for ethnic, social, and religious fulfillment.

At the societal level, this study examines a topic that has received limited attention to an ever-increasing population of subsequent generations of immigrants from all continents. The consideration of faith among ethnic minorities is truly relevant in today's organic, interconnected world. The world that once consisted of thousands of separate, autonomous cultures is quickly forcing them to become one global culture of modernity. Globalism itself is by no means a new phenomenon. Nonetheless, the speed at which it has occurred since the last century has forced millions of people to interact with cultures that have entirely different practices and beliefs. The rate at which cultures are clashing and dying because of ethnic and religious differences requires, more than ever, every human to accept cultural relativism as a fact of human nature and increase

the understanding of how various cultures arrive at meaning through their distinct religious practices and traditions. More specific to this Catholic rite, at a global level, an examination of the role of the Maronite Church in America will promote its mission to serve its global faithful living in cultural settings that differ from its spiritual motherland. The global success of the Maronite Church assures that the universal Catholic Church can retain its relevance in the Middle East, where Lebanon is the last nation in the region with a strong Catholic presence.

This study will offer a different perspective on the role of the ethnic churches. The Maronite Church has diligently retained its sacred identity while retaining its relevance among subsequent generations committed to the inherited sacred practices and traditions of their ancestors while being fully integrated into the American culture. This study will add to the scholarly understanding of assimilation and retention of ethnic identity beyond the second generation. This generation's adherence to ethnicity is rarely studied due to the prevalence of abandonment at this level. In addition to the increased understanding of ethnic identity preservation among subsequent generations, this study will add to the base of knowledge on the value of ethnic-religious institutions in America, an area of study ignored in academic studies.

The study will add to the theoretical knowledge base of knowledge relating to the assimilation process. Most assimilation theories state that the abandonment of ethnic identity is a natural and often unavoidable progression among successive generations. Most research in this area focuses on the second generation, with the understanding that the impact of adaptation at this generation level exhibits the completion of the process for most individuals. This study's participants are third and fourth generations, who have had continuity of their ethnic identity, with little movement toward abandonment; instead, there appears to be the compartmentalization of both Lebanese and American identities that are concurrently operational at these generational

levels. This study's population has never disconnected themselves from their ethnic identity, and ethnic rejuvenation is experienced through the active level of regular participation in this ethnic-religious institution rather than merely a brief resurgence or limited exposure. This study attempts to determine if this experience in the Eastern-rite Maronite Church implies that individuals have renegotiated their position amid their assimilation into the American culture or if it creates the potential construction of otherness when forming a salient identity when seeking self-identification. Selective ethnicity (Gans, 1979) lets the individual determine how they assimilate, to what extent, and redefine what it means to be Lebanese in America.

Understanding the value of ethnic churches among cross generations will add to the conservation of ethnic-religious institutions within American society that is often quick to dismiss and disregard its importance in the pursuit of homogeny. Although this study focuses on the Lebanese American Maronite, many similar groups with similar challenges and experiences could benefit from this study's insights. Whereas it is agreed that the assimilation theory of abandonment of ethnic identity is old-fashioned, it should be noted that it is the result of assimilation that instigates incorporation or extinction on ethnic churches. The intersection of ethnicity and religion continues in our society with new arrivals each day, bringing their unique way of worship. The continued silent imposing of these groups' adaptation and their descendants will hinder the goal of pluralism aimed for by our society. This study of the Maronite phenomenon targets all who value a greater understanding of diversity in America and seeks to develop a living connection to other cultures and belief systems for self-knowledge and the promotion of pluralism in society. The inadvertent stripping away of ethnicity and ethnic-religious belief systems will weaken any society that maintains homogeny as its default. An ethnic-religious institution is just one of the social institutions that are impacted by assimilation.



## Chapter Summary

Understanding the needs and challenges of their faithful diaspora followers, the Maronite Church accepts the fusion between religious and ethnic identity as a relevant and accurate Maronite identity (Ghosn, 2010; Noort & Noort, 2012). The Maronite Church members in America have proven to be loyal to their sacred heritage, as noted in the preservation of the faith, with the numerous Maronite Churches throughout the nation. Many of these churches were established by the immigrant population that arrived in the late 19th century, with over 80 Maronite Churches operational at this time. The San Antonio Maronite Church was established nearly a century ago by the immigrant families who wished to worship in the same manner that they were accustomed to in the old country. It was a transitional church for the early arrivals and a viable, thriving church maintained by their descendants. This study begins a conversation on the role of ethnic churches among successive generations, examining the factors that influence the continued level of engagement long after this sample population has integrated into American society. This study answers the question of whether their behavior is a result of their adherence to the traditional religious practices and traditions or whether this faith-based community has become merely an expression of an ethnic social institution for cultural renewal for the successive generations. The answers will offer an insight as this ethnic Church moves forward and prepares to serve future generations' needs while maintaining its sacred mission as a body of the Catholic Church.

This faith is distinct in its theological presentation. The community is equally unique in its strong ethnic self-identification yet has received little attention from theoretical or empirical studies. This study fills the gaps in the literature and offers a fresh perspective on the topic of the elements necessary for continued reliance among successive generations. The objective of

discovering the reasons for attendance is to develop a workable sustainability model that can assist this religious institution as it looks to the future.

## **Chapter II: Review of the Literature**

While there are numerous studies relating to the ethnic-religious practices among other groups, there have been only a few that have focused on the Lebanese population. The impact of ethnoreligious practices and identification among Middle Eastern Christians in America is a relatively uncharted area in the academic field of study. Other than the sporadic study of the Middle Eastern Christian assimilation process at the turn of the century, there has been little mention in the academic literature of the impact of this Christian groups' insistence on preserving their ancestral heritage through their religious practices. This seems peculiar; being that religion plays such an influential role in the shaping of identity among this ethnic group worldwide. This noticeable lack of literature might be attributed to the fact that the early Christian Lebanese immigrants were known for their rapid assimilation, absorption, and adoption of their host country ways in an effort to assure economic and social advantages afforded with inclusion. The Lebanese were so successful in Americanization that they have become non-distinctive in areas of study relating to assimilation and identity over the past decades. Although a majority of individuals of Lebanese descent have assimilated with ease in the American secular and sacred society, there remains a small minority of Lebanese who have sought to maintain and preserve their part of their distinct heritage through their religious affiliation in the Maronite Church. This proposed work will seek to address this gap in the literature relating to how the Middle Eastern Christian's religious practices create, interact with and influence the secular and sacred experience of the Lebanese American Maronite in America.

The research performed for this work includes broad areas of study, including the Maronite Church and its formation in America, religious identification among the Lebanese diaspora, the constructs for generating identity among the Lebanese in America from the initial

conceptual framework of assimilation and identity development. The studies pulled and reviewed for this work provided a broad example of Lebanese groups from various regional locations in the United States as well as supplementary countries. This chapter reviews sources from academic peer-reviewed journals, books, and religious-based literature (Maronite and Catholic) and historical documents. A review of such text provides clarity on the Maronite Church and its role in the lives of the successive generations. Understanding this unique Eastern Rite and the importance among the Lebanese diaspora provides clarity on the attachment that this specific population holds to this religious institution. This minority group, Lebanese, and their minority Catholic practices, Maronite, have been dismissed in the academic field, as evident in the blatant lack of studies in this area.

This chapter will also explore theoretical dimensions relating to this particular population of successive generation Lebanese, such as assimilation and acculturation, religious identity, ethnic identity, and social identity development. In addressing the topic of sustainability, a capacity framework will be explored as the foundation for a capability plan that is created based upon the findings which emerged within this study. This capability plan can be utilized or implemented by this institution to address the weakness and strengths identified by the community as related to their stated needs in making this site complete.

### **Contextual Background of the Lebanese Maronite**

The shift in faithful that began over a century ago, and continues, has challenged the religious authority of the Maronite Church and its practices in a spiritual community far removed from the Motherland. In the Church's arduous attempt to preserve the faith and keep it relevant for the successive generations isolated from the motherland with time and space, there is a concerted effort to remain relevant. The Maronite Church is caught between preserving its sacred

heritage and seeking to establish itself among the faithful in a radically different society then it was founded, without losing its identity. To gain a deeper understanding of the Maronite in America and San Antonio, it is necessary to have a surface understanding of the history of this Rite and the expansion of the Church, which resulted in a worldwide congregation that continues to look to Lebanon for its spiritual guidance and leadership. To understand the Church and its role in the identity of the Lebanese American, it is necessary to have an extensive understanding of the exclusivity of the Maronite institutions' religious practices and traditions and how these are durable identity markers encompassing this distinctive Rite.

The Lebanese immigrated to various countries during the early 20th century to seek economic stability and religious freedom denied to the Christians in Lebanon during the Ottoman Regime (Naff, 1993; Orfalea, 2006; Ozdil, 2007). The studies pulled and reviewed for this work provided a comprehensive example of Lebanese, from various regional locations in the United States, and supplementary countries relevant to the topic of study. Much of the available research focuses on the group's adjustment into new foreign cultures and the retention of their ethnic institutions that have kept the culture alive in their new lands. A limited number of studies have noted the preservation of the ancestral faith as a reliable marker of their culture and a means of continued ethnic maintenance. It is relevant to understand the Maronite Rite's duality as a marker of both secular and sacred identity among the Lebanese American, for in many instances, it is the dichotomy of the Maronite Church (sacred and secular) in America that has served this population over the generations. The Maronite faith cannot be practiced in a vacuum; it relies heavily on the existence of the cultural milieu from which it is expressed. The Maronite Synod (2003-2006) states that "the expansion of the Church is part of its history and that the presence of the Church abroad still needs to look to the Mother church in Lebanon to confirm their identity.

The Maronite should not rely on the Western identity alone but must integrate the Maronite Church and having an organic bonding with her to be a Maronite”. The Maronite Church has asked the fusion between religious identity and ethnic identity to have a relevant and accurate Maronite identity (Ghosn, 2010; Noort & Noort, 2012).

The Maronite Church is similar in being a metaphor of culture, for it is a religious practice that is closely tied to culture and is continuously recreated by the priest and the parish members through its unique representations and symbols of Lebanon. This construction and reconstruction of the distinct rite assume a specific characteristic pertaining to the migrant experiences of displacement and social exclusion both within the society and the Catholic Church. The Lebanese American inscribes their experience using their religious experience as a means of connecting there past with their present. For many Lebanese Americans, the Maronite Church provides the only place where they can learn about their secular and sacred heritage of their homeland. This stated need for the duality of sacred and secular culture for survival has ensured a worldwide congregation that continues to flourish nearly a century since its expansion. Unlike many other ethnic churches that have lost their followers to other countries and normative religious institutions as a result of immigration, the Maronite Church has been able to retain its spiritual authority. While there are a limited number of studies in this area of the Maronite Church’s role among the diaspora, it is a noteworthy topic that deserves further examination.

Middle Eastern countries can be described as having more traditional cultures than those considered as typical within America. One of the most prominent objective measures of this traditionalism is the affiliation to religion (Faragallah, Schumm, & Web, 1997). In this area, religious ideologies reinforced social-communal consciousness and fostered religious separatism and oppression (Kayal & Kayal, 1975). Religion has a history of being one of Lebanon’s central

conflicts and a centrifugal force, which has resulted in centuries of turmoil and maltreatment within this region. The current narratives of violence and unrest which have played out for the world's attention have only recently brought focus on the level of religious conflicts; however, upon closer examination, it can be credited to being the determining element in the mass immigration over the past century. The mayhem that plagued the lands over a century ago remains a significant deterrent factor in the continued flow of immigrants from this region. It can be speculated that the hostility which results in civil turmoil is born of the shared sacred heritage of the population. This culture traces their origins to Abraham in the Old Testament. The birth of three Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam took place in this region. However, the three beliefs diverged in ways that made it difficult for them to share the same land peacefully and without subrogation. The sectarianism structure of Arab society is intricately entwined with loyalty to religion, village, and family (Naff, 1993). This system of values breeds family and group ties with strong clannish and factional tendencies (Thernstrom, Orlov, & Handlin, 1980). Fanatical adherence, violent defense, and national division based upon one's faith in this region have provoked hundreds of year's oppression and misery for all its population. Religious identification as a means of determining peoplehood in this land resulted in great distress for many (Shankland & Tremayne, 2009). As a result of persecution and subjugation, Christian immigrants arrived in America with the collective burden of a history of persecution and survival (Haddad, 2001). For many of these immigrants, the collective memory of struggle and persecution for religious beliefs united them as an ethnic group. It fostered the establishment of Maronite Churches in their new lands. The early immigrants to America brought with them their treasured cultural heritage and identities that were shaped overseas, along with a history of suffering and perseverance. The story of the Lebanese Maronite is a true

reflection of a divergence between ancient and modern traditionalism of the Middle East that is subjugated by religious sectarianism. The narration of suffering endured and of strength received from their Maronite faith has become the ideology that unites all Maronite worldwide and throughout generations. Understanding the Maronite presence in America today involves an appreciation of the Eastern traditionalism of the past and this traditionalist influence upon the present as the institution, and its followers, adjust in the Western Christian lands.

As a result of unresolved turmoil and imposed disparity a mass exodus resulted. This recognized departure began at the turn of the 20th century during the Ottoman Regime. The ruling policies and mandates at this time in history led to unsustainable political, economic, and religious burdens placed upon the Christian population. As a result of religious conflict, Christianity in the Middle East has a long and thick history of survival against high odds. Since the beginning of Christianity, there has been ideological disruption, heresy, and schism among the Eastern religious communities, which has tested the faith of all Christians of the Middle East. For centuries, the Maronite rite remained faithful to Rome, hidden within the mountainous terrain of Lebanon, leading prayerful austere lives without confrontation. This enclave of peace against a background of unrest was disrupted in the mid-19th century as the Ottoman regime eradicated this group through political, social, and religious subjugation. This persecution resulted in economic stagnation, political domination, and religious discrimination. Although deeply attached to their native land, the Maronite had little reason to remain in Mt. Lebanon imperiled by repressive policies and domination positioned upon their affiliation to the Christian faith (Naff, 1993). Unwilling to suffer under non-renting tyranny, one-fourth of the Christian population began its exodus to America starting in the late 19th century. With minimal possessions to claim as their own, the only proprietorship these village peasants had was their



faith, which they transplanted in a new land. The first great wave of Lebanese Maronite immigration to the United States began in the late 1870s, peaked in 1914, dropping to a few hundred a year during World War I (Tabar, 2005).

The ebb and flow of Christian immigrants have remained constant during the 20th century. This migration continued into the 21st century, coinciding with the political and religious conflicts that continue to plague this region for over a century. Collectively, all immigrants fled their native land of Lebanon in the pursuit of an improved life, one that is absent of violence and destruction and promises economic prosperity and religious autonomy. One of the most notable binds the immigrants had been the shared history of oppression and struggle resulting from their religious affiliation, which they brought to their new countries. These stories of hardships united the new arrival and resonated in their need to freely practice their faith in their new countries without subrogation or fear of retaliation imposed upon them when practicing their faith. The steady and continual flow of Maronite immigration has produced a flourishing and noteworthy population in America. Evidence of continued violent strife and religious discrimination in the Middle East points to the fact that a diaspora population will continue to grow with time. This predicted outcome of continued strife relegates the importance of the Maronite Church in America as more diaspora arrive.

Lebanese Maronite immigration story. The seclusion of the mountainous terrain contributed to the perpetuation of parochialism and the peaceful practice of the faith. The hidden villages of Mt. Lebanon offered the backdrop for this oppressed minority religious group to take refuge during the historical time of religious conflict (Thernstrom et al., 1980). The Maronite and Ottomans' relationships were further complicated by the affiliation of the Maronite with the Roman Catholic Church of the West. The Western Church, competing for influence in Ottoman

Empire, exploited the Maronite sect's loyalties for their own interest, disrupting the tradition of accommodation between Muslims and Christians (Thernstrom et al., 1980). This interference generated hostility between Muslims and Christians, which exculpated to an exodus of the Christians. Fear of not being able to maintain their Islamic tradition in a Western Christian society discouraged a mass migration of Muslims to the United States (Smith, 2002). As a result, over 90% of immigrants from Lebanon during this time were Christian, most of whom were Maronites from Mt. Lebanon. The number of Lebanese immigrants to the Americas was immense. There is the estimate that over one-third of the population of the mountainous region of this country immigrated from their homelands in pursuit of a better life (Thernstrom et al, 1980).

The first waves of immigrants were initially seen as clannish, alien, and inassimilable (Naff, 1993). Many of the first immigrants had little intentions of extending their stay in America, with the intended goal of returning to Lebanon once the conflict resided with enough money to survive upon their glorious return to their villages. As for this group, assimilation was a commodity, a price to pay to secure social acceptance that resulted in economic success. Their objective was to make enough money in the shortest time and return to their homes once the turmoil and oppression ceased (Suleiman, 1999, p. 6). By trying to stay free from conforming to the new land culture and preserving their ethnicity, many immigrants hastened the process of putting down roots and delayed the assimilation process. After WWI, most realized that returning home was never to materialize and decided to settle in their new land and become Americans. Americanization was rapid for this determined group, and by the second generation, most were able to emulate the American culture and gain entry into the significant social institutions (Naff, 1993). For many Christian immigrants, peddling was the most accessible

means of sustainability upon their arrival. Peddling became more profitable and easier once they began to look like Americans, talk like Americans, and worship like them. Many did adapt to the American culture, and assimilation was accomplished rather quickly (Naff, 1993). These Lebanese acquainted themselves well in their new country and its people, changing their surnames, clothing attire, language, marriage practices, and even religious attendance to fit into their host land ways.

The initial lack of expansion of the Maronite Church into the Western world, which is Roman or Latin, drove many of her children to abandon their original eastern heritage and join the Latin Church to conserve their Catholic faith (Kayal & Kayal, 1975). For the Maronite immigrant, familiar with Western ideology from interaction with Rome, accepting Western religious norms was not difficult within the American Christian society. For many early immigrants, the need to begin a new life meant to release the burden of retaining their ancestral religion and its customs. The Latin rite of America welcomed the newly immigrated conditionally (Kayal & Kayal, 1975). The Maronite, like many ethnic Catholics at the time, was required to abandon their Eastern practices and traditions and adopt the Western practices and traditions of the Latin rite (Herberg, 1973). Lebanese Americans are known for their rapid assimilation and adoption of their host country to assure economic and social advantages afforded with this adaptation; this included integration into the Latin rite. For this population, the passage into the Latin Rite allowed them the luxury of quick assimilation and acceptance into American society. Accepting the predominant Latin rite and integrating into this Western institution posed little stress or tension. Latinization became the religious equivalent of the groups' willingness and desire to be Americanized (Pulcini, 1993). Based upon the Latinization of the Lebanese Maronite as means of Americanization, it is most likely that more Lebanese

Americans are serving in the Latin rite than American Maronites' serving on their own (Kayal & Kayal, 1975).

The assimilation process had its challenges; for many immigrants and their children, solace was sought through close family connections within their tightly knit community centered on their families and faith. Many Lebanese retained their foods, music, and religious traditions and practices during their assimilation process and passed these values on to future generations through their faith-based community (Naff, 1993). Since these immigrants were from the same part of the old country and generationally from the same religious sect, they tended to form small communities where they could recreate their "old country" existence in the new county. One of the characteristics that many immigrants settled in these communities sought to recreate was Lebanon's different religious life and spirituality. For those Lebanese who were highly active in the religious Maronite life before immigration, the desire to maintain this level of involvement in the new lands was strong (Leichtman, 2013). These individuals did not willingly accept Latinization that their fellow countrymen had and promoted the Maronite faith and its socio-cultural life in the milieu in America.

For the immigrants in highly populated Lebanese communities, there was the luxury of finding comfort and support with the establishment of Maronite communities. These faith-based communities became the center of their ethnic ghetto neighborhoods and served to preserve their ethnic ways while adapting to the new life. The first Maronite Church, established in 1890 in New York City, was created to meet the needs of the considerable number of Lebanese immigrants resided in "Little Syria." By the end of WWI, there were more than 24 Maronite Churches in the United States (Kayal, 1973). The Maronite Church provides the needed preservation of their cultural and religious heritage that was valued by the immigrants and passed

on to subsequent generations. Today there are over 80 Maronite Churches in America; five are located in Texas. The San Antonio Maronite Church, St. George Maronite Catholic Church, is the oldest of these religious institutions. All the original Maronite Churches established by the immigrant population still exist and thrive throughout America.

**White Christian identity in the United States.** The Lebanese immigrant population is known for its rapid assimilation into the American culture (Naff, 1993). Adaptation for the immigrant and first-generation Lebanese was determined upon their acceptance as being White. The early Maronite experienced relative eases into the American culture because their religious practices aligned with the American Christian practice of Catholicism. Their exposure and familiarity with the Western world as a result of their alliance with Rome (Universal Church) allowed for rapid acceptance. This distinction of being from the Middle East but Christian allowed for less traumatic assimilation and has remained an underlying element of identity amongst this population of subsequent generations (Gaultieri, 2001). For most Lebanese Christian, the need to disassociate themselves from fellow Lebanese of the Islamic faith is a strong influence when forming an identity (Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007). This distancing and separation between religious characters are prevalent in the American experience of the Lebanese American. The “us” for the Lebanese Maronite is compared to the “them” of the Moslems; and this extension of self-identity that began the wave of immigration and continues today in Lebanon and here. Ethnic identifiable with the host society and the ending of discrimination and value conflict would be the final stage of absorption (Gaultieri, 2001).

Nonetheless, this current state of the collective identity of all Lebanese, Christian, and Muslim, in a derogatory manner, has resulted in an altered American experience and a reassessment of status. This disparaging assessment denied many assimilated Lebanese to be

openly proud of their heritage and faith as part of their acculturation. Many deal with this open discrimination with a “sense of injustice, awkwardness, and shame, and others joined in with their fellow Americans by simultaneously denigrating their people and heritage to remain in the norm” (Suleiman, 1999, p. 12). This discrimination made them more conscious of their ethnic identity that was once taken for granted. The children and subsequent generations of immigrants became aware of the marginality of their ethnic identity; they became dissonant in their acculturation and became wounded by acculturation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). Ethnic identity can be heightened or blurred, depending on the degree of dissonance or consonance of the social groups they identify with as the basis of their identity formation (Hage, 2005). Prejudices against Lebanese and other Arabs have increased over the past decade, which has affected the level of pride that many feel towards their heritage and has interrupted their ethnic identity affirmation. While some Lebanese may move away from their identity and converge further into American society, others may become dissonant and have a desire to rediscover their ethnic identity (Suleiman, 1999).

Louise Cainkar’s study focusing on the early immigrant experience explores the assimilation process of Arab Americans and the struggles early immigrants faced based upon discrimination and prejudices experienced as White ethnics (Cainkar, 2006). In Cainkar’s work, she investigates the reasons behind the Arab American decline in the assimilation process. Noting the move away from the early immigrant experience of linear assimilation in social, economic, and political to the present perceived marginalization of the Arab American due to discrimination and misconstruction of role in society. “Arab-Americans as a group have experienced a major social shift from the margins of the mainstream to its outer boundaries” (Cainkar, 2006, p. 275). Negative perceptions of Arab Americans have resulted in a shift in the

character of the integration experience. They have had a profound impact on the social identity process of this group. Examining the shift in inclusion by this Arab American group, Cainkar focuses on the construction of the identity of this group has had to alter due to changing sentiment of discrimination, separation, and exclusion. Early immigrants were able to assimilate linearly, and this rather straightforward manner of adaption is partially attributed to their Christian foundation. Recent immigrants face obstacles in their integration due to increased exclusion, religious stereotyping (Islamic faith), and policy implementation as a result of the 9/11 attacks on America supposedly by Arab Moslems. Increased government measures targeting Arabs and open stereotyping of all Arabs, Christians, and Moslems started immediately after these attacks and have continued to marginalize this group. In this study, I examined the role of Arabs as White in our society to explore the level of assimilation afforded to them. Cainkar concludes that the Arab American experience is affected by the historical timing of the group's presence in America. The classification of White is modified based on political and social views. The arrival of the second wave of Arabs to America, and the resulting racialization that occurred, has resulted in the marginalization of this group. Arabs are deemed inherently different and with religious dispositions that are not within the norm of society and thus slow to be accepted. This work showed how racialization in America is not a concept of the past but is still prevalent when directed at groups perceived as White (Cainkar, 2006).

In an Australian study by Hage (2005), "Maronites white self-racialization as identity fetishism: Capitalism and the experience of colonial whiteness" the concept of identity is explored. Hage examines the belief that the Christian Lebanese whiteness is the basis of looks, habits, customs, religion, and bloodline. The Maronites were Christians, and as a result, were racialized in the world view as being White (Hage, 2005). In contrast, the Muslims were Arab

and were placed lower on the cultural hierarchy based on this religious difference. Because of the European identity, the Lebanese were able to immigrate to Western countries with ease and assimilated quickly. In Lebanon, the Maronite was viewed as the “other” by the end of the 19th century as the Arab encroached on the Mountains of Lebanon. It was the Maronite Church that provided protection and unity among the villagers. It reminded them of their identity as Maronite, one that did not articulate cultural differentiation (Hage, 2005).

The cultural differentiation began with France emerging as protectors of the Maronite during the rule of the Ottomans. At this point, the Maronite believed they represented the embodiment of western civilization in the Levant. This connection with Europe gave the Maronite the prevalent feeling that they were allowed more opportunities away from Lebanon than their non-Christian neighbors. The Maronite identity gave this group the potential to blend into the American society denied to other Lebanese non-Christians. (Hage, 2005). Being seen as White represents a sociological category that demarcates unspoken privileges and power in America, so the Lebanese Maronite quickly understood the benefits of this classification and categorization given to them by America and assimilated smoothly and gained acceptance within their host country.

In a similar study by Adjrouh and Jamal (2007), “Assimilating to a White identity: The Case of Arab Americans,” the issue of assimilation of the Arab American is examined drawing from the tenants of segmented assimilation. The Arab Christians are more likely to refer to themselves as White, whereas the non-Christian Arabs do not self-identify as White. The Christian Arabs have a strong identity as being Christian and White. In contrast, the other Arab groups have a strong ethnic identity but do not see themselves as White as part of their assimilation into the American culture. This study proposes that because non-Christians feel



more stigmatized than their Christian counterparts, this halts their assimilation resulting in a strong affinity to the minority status. The study demonstrated that members of the immigrant group, which is not deemed White, retain selective aspects of the immigrant culture and carefully chooses which element of the mainstream host society to adopt. Although the Arab Muslim is classified as White legally, they do not necessarily identify as part of that privileged group, suggesting segmentation concerning a non-White identity (Adjrouch & Jamal, 2007).

This concept of religious affiliation is a strong influencer on the self-identity of the Arab immigrant and subsequent generations; is further supported in the works of Kayal and Kayal (1975). In their work they support the notion that by being Middle Eastern Christian, the early immigrants were able to assimilate quickly in this Christian nation. Lebanese Maronites do not consider themselves Arab, although they have strong ethnic (Arab) identities (Kayal & Kayal, 1975). Kayal and Kayal (1975) explored the ethnic traits that contributed to a White racial identity announcement and how self-identifying as White created a strong sense of “other” towards the Arab Americans who were not equally classified. Believing that they were part of the dominant group of Americans motivated many to have complete assimilation early in their immigrant experience. Today many immigrants from the Middle East are not predominantly Christian and are not readily willing to claim White as their identity. Orfalea (1989) follows this same line of thinking when he states that America is not as willing to classify them as White due to the stigmatizing of the Arab Islamic nation (Orfalea, 1989).

The desire to be Americanized and accepted in American society was not limited to the individuals but applied to the Church, which quickly modified their structures and practices to conform to many of the norms that were present in the American religion expectations. Although traditional Maronite rituals have not disappeared entirely, there is a tendency to conform within

the Latin liturgical practices (Kayal & Kayal, 1975). There have been changes made within the Church that were necessary as part of the changing demographics and levels of integration amongst future generations of Maronites in America. The adaptation of the Church in the effort to meet the needs of the faithful has been minor. Over the past century, since it arrived in America, there have been minor adaptations to meet American Maronite's needs. Some of these changes include liturgical vernacular (English vs. Arabic), partaking of sermons as a focal point of the service (rather than the traditional focus on the mystery of offering), and the increasing role of the laity in managing the affairs of church activities and rectories (who are not Maronite by birth rite). Although there have been minor adaptations within the Rite, overall, it has retained its purity in its Eastern roots in most distinctive traditions and practices (Beshara, 2002).

Although the Church made minor changes in its practices and structure, this Latinization did not relinquish it from its obligation to the faithful (Kayal & Kayal, 1975; Stephens, 2009). Latinization did not mean de-Arabization. The Church remained a church of the Lebanese, serving the community and maintaining the spiritual and cultural heritage in its purity while blending into the American consciousness. It was the maintenance of these practices, traditions, and symbols within the Church that speaks of its deep spirituality and theology.

### **Maronite Rite Sacred Identity**

A sense of religion provokes communal consciousness and collective emotions, enhancing a sense of group identity and establishing the group itself as a worthy, 'sacred' reality (Smith, 2002). With the adherence to the Maronite faith, the Lebanese Americans have preserved a communal consciousness and connected social group, which enhances a sense of identity (both group and individual) and, as a result, must establish this sacred reality. To understand the Church's role in the identity of the Lebanese American requires an understanding of the

exclusivity of the Maronite institutions' religious practices and traditions and how these are active identity markers encompass this distinctive Rite. Such elements include the Syriac/Aramaic liturgical language, the liturgical Arabic hymns, the Arabesque architecture (LaHoud, 2008) of its churches and community centers, and the liturgical art and signs of the faith.

The followers of the Maronite Church form a part of the Syriac Christian Church and are part of the West Syriac Catholic Rite. The Maronite Church is in communion with the Catholic Church and shares the same dogmatic faith, sacraments, and moral teachings. Although the Maronite Church is in communion with the Catholic Church, these rites worship differently, sharing the essence of the faith but expressing it differently. The Maronite Church expresses its own culture and traditions to exercise the ecclesiastical faith in the Lord. The Maronite Church encompasses a unique liturgy, theology, spirituality, and discipline. The Maronite Rite, characterized by its own cultural and linguistic tradition, is self-governing and guided by its Eparchy (Beshara, 2002). During the Maronite Patriarchal Assembly in 2003, leaders described the Maronite Church's identity as having five distinguishing marks. These distinct characteristics are: the Maronite is Antiochene, the Maronite Church is Chalcedonian, the Maronite Church is Patriarchal and monastic, the Maronite Church is devoted to the See of Peter in Rome, and the Maronite Church is tied to Lebanon (Beshara, 2002). Many distinctive elements within the faith's practices mark it as unique and "foreign" within the context of normative religious practices and traditions accepted in America. These unique elements distinguish the faith worldwide and provide an element of unification between the Church and the Lebanese diaspora.

It is relevant to examine the unique liturgy, the vernacular, and visual symbols that are distinct to this Rite. The distinctiveness of this Maronite Tradition traverses with social processes

reflecting a relationship of spirituality and heritage for all ages, generations, class, and varied assimilation stages. Special liturgical rites do not identify the Eastern Churches; there are specific traditions and cultural mores that distinguish them from others. Of importance to the uniqueness of the ethnic Church are its theology and physical characteristics. The Maronite Rite has a distinct liturgical language, ceremonial dress, music, standard of morality, and religious structure that identifies it as an Eastern Rite. Understanding the Church and its role in the identity of the Lebanese American, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of the exclusivity of the Maronite institutions' religious practices and traditions and how these are active identity markers encompassing this distinctive Rite.

**Ecumenical distinctions.** The Maronite Rite, established amid the Cedars of Lebanon, has been heavily influenced by its sacred culture from the customs reflective of the Lebanese character over the many centuries of existence. Maronite Rite was founded by John Maron, a fourth-century Lebanese monk. Because it was rooted in the monostatic culture of Mt. Lebanon it is culturally reflective of the people it serves. In keeping with its heritage's true essence, the Rite is in the Monastic tradition in its ecumenical practices and customs (Haber et al., 2011). Keeping with the Monastic tradition, faithful is asked to be prayerful and contemplative in their daily lives and focus on Christ's resurrection. The appearance is distinctly Eastern, but the liturgical seasons are also different, for instance, the Season of the Cross, Season of the Announcement, Season of Lent, and Season of Easter. The vestments do not change colors according to these Seasons (Beshara, 2002). The Sacraments also vary from the Latin rite; most notable is that of Baptism, which is combined with the sacraments of Confirmation and often First Communion.

These variances in traditions and practices that distinguish this Rite within the Universal Church are distinctive based on its cultural relevance that brings meaning to the Church-going population living in San Antonio. For the Maronite faithful, the connection between the motherland and abroad has not severed. All world members continue to turn their eyes towards Lebanon for spiritual and ecumenical guidance. The Maronite liturgy has a powerful influence over its faithful. It plays an active role in the receiving of the faith as it is rooted in the Maronite religious heritage and spiritual traditions. Immigrants have spiritual needs which are most meaningful when packaged in familiar linguistic and cultural context (Hirschman, 2004). This reliance on the liturgical language has remained a vital element among the subsequent generation. The most prominent distinction of the Church is the Maronite Liturgy (Qurbono) modeled on the original, monastic liturgy formed at Antioch from the second century using the Aramaic language spoken by Christ and the Apostles and is used by all Maronite's worldwide.

The liturgy commission has never altered since its conception and remains authentic to its Aramaic Syriac legacy. The Qurbono, or service of the Holy Mysteries, is often referred to as Mass in the Latin Rite. The Qurbono is presented in the Aramaic mother tongue and has not altered over the centuries. The entire service of the Maronite liturgy focuses on the entirety of liturgical gestures, including liturgical language (Aramaic), liturgical hymns (Arabic Chants), Arabesque architecture, and the liturgical visual art (Icons) and signs of the faith from the beginning to the end of the Qurbono (Almubayei, 2006).

***Liturgical vernacular.*** In Mount Lebanon, the Maronites were able to maintain their independent status to practice their faith freely. Thus their religious beliefs and liturgical language (Aramaic) were preserved since the fourth century (García-Arenal, 2009). The text of the Mass should be in the vernacular (Aramaic/Syriac), mainly when the priest speaks to the

congregation (St. George Maronite Church, n.d.). Words of Consecration, the Epiclesis (the invocation of the Holy Spirit), and certain hymns and blessings are spoken in the original Aramaic, the language used by Christ, to remind the faithful of their Maronite heritage and traditions (St. George Maronite Church, n.d.).

The chief use of language is to attach the individual to language that demonstrates belonging to a social group (Almubayei, 2006; Crystal, 2007). Aramaic liturgical language is the spiritual and religious heritage of the Maronites, and the fundamental element preserved as part of the heritage of the Church. There are many examples from which liturgical or holy language varies depending on the vernacular of the ethnic group of worshipers in the Catholic Rites. Because it has preserved the original liturgical language and customary behavior, it has gained significance amongst the followers and has become more sacred and cherished (Labaki, 2014). It serves as a reminder of the history of the Church and the strong alliance the members have with the old country, providing the necessary cohesion of the Lebanese across the world.

In the Maronite rite, the perseverance of the original Aramaic or Syriac divine liturgy language performed during the Consecration, the Epiclesis or invocation of the Holy Spirit, as well as certain hymns and blessings is sacred and an integral part of the perseverance of the Rite and a reminder of the Maronite heritage (Beshara, 2002; Roen, 2004).

An example of the celebrant's liturgy vernacular demonstrates the uniqueness of this liturgical language specific to the Eastern world. The American congregation, familiar with the service, can follow the celebrant's words and respond appropriately without the familiarity of the language by using the church prayer books. The congregants who follow along using the phonetic translation found under the script in the mass book.

وَيَبْرُؤُا هُوَ دَقْدُمُ حَشَا دِيْلَةَ مَغْبِدْ حِيَا.

نُسَبُ لِّلْحَمَّا بِيَدُو قَدِيْشُنَا .وَبِرْخُ وَقَدِشْ

:وَقَصَا وَيَبُ لَتَلْمِيْدُو كَدُ اَمَرُ

.سَبُ اَخُوْلُ مِنْهُ كُوْلُخُوْنُ

.هُنَا دِنِيْتُو فَعْرَا دِيْلُ

.دَخْلَفِيْكُوْنُ وَخَلْفُ سَحِيْبَا مَثْقَصَا وَمِنْهَبُ

.لُحُوْسِيْا دُحُوْبَا وَلَحِيَا دَلْعَلْمُ غُلْمِيْنُ .اَمِيْنُ

.هُخْنَا عَلُ كُسا دَمَزِيْعُ وَا مِنْ حَمْرَا وَمِنْ مِيَا

:بِرْخُ وَقَدِشْ وَيَبُ لَتَلْمِيْدُو كَدُ اَمَرُ

.سَبُ اِشْتُو مِنْهُ كُوْلُخُوْنُ

.هُنَا دِنِيْتُو دُمَا دِيْلُ دَدِيْبِيْتِيْقِي حَدْنَا

.دَخْلَفِيْكُوْنُ وَخَلْفُ سَحِيْبَا .مِثْشِدُ وَمِنْهَبُ

.لُحُوْسِيْا دُحُوْبَا وَلَحِيَا دَلْعَلْمُ غُلْمِيْنُ .اَمِيْنُ

Ho-kha-no'al ko-so dam-zeegh wo

men ham-ro ou-men ma-yo

ba-rekh

ou-qa-desh

ou-ya-be-tal rnee-dow kad o-mar:

Sab esh-tow meh-neh kul-khoon:

Ho-no den ee-tow dmo deel

dee-ya-tee-quee hda-to

dah-lo-fy-koon wah-lof sa-gee-yeh

meh-teh-shed ou-meh-tee-heb

lhoo-so-yo dhow-beh wal-ha-yeh dal-o'-lam'ol-meen.

Aramaic is the spiritual and religious heritage of the Maronites, and the fundamental element preserved as part of the heritage of the Church (García-Arenal, 2009). Language choice is a signal to others of identity, ethnic, religious, or social identity adopted at this Rite. Liturgical language has remained the same over the century, and its distinctiveness serves as the performative function (Consecration, Creed, and Blessings) and is the volition of the participant (Crystal, 2007) of the members. The research performed by Japal and Coyle (2012), with Muslim participants, reported that liturgical language (Arabic) was an immensely important self-aspect for the construction of individual and collective identity. Most of the participants viewed the liturgical language as being holy and fundamental to their religious identity (Japal & Coyle, 2012). There has been a new area of study that focuses on the role of language in the construction of religious identity, specifically among ethnic groups (Japal & Coyle, 2010). In the research performed by Japal and Coyle, Muslim participants reported that liturgical language (Arabic) was an immensely important self-aspect for the construction of individual and collective identity. Many of the participants viewed the liturgical language as being holy and fundamental to their religious identity. (Japal & Coyle, 2010). In general, the study found that heritage language and liturgical language are important but contextual in their relevance. Based on the evidence that liturgical language has importance to the religious identity, there is an element of perceived incompetence in the language that can have adverse outcomes or feelings of alienation or lack of belonging among participants who lack competency. Individuals believed in the importance of liturgical language in their religious identity; however, due to a lack of competency in the language resulted in a feeling of strong religious identity and dissonance.

***Liturgical music.*** The Maronite Church's music is an ancient heritage and considered to be one of the more precious treasures of the Maronite Tradition. The singing of the hymns is



deemed a blessed prayer and cannot be separated from the liturgical celebration (Guilnard, 2010). The Maronite Church's sacred music is "Syro-Antiochene and Semitic, meaning they are based on the Syriac language tradition prevailing in Antioch and using the Antiochene liturgy" (Abdullah, 2004). Arabic hymns are sung during the liturgy at the Maronite Church and are both poetic and spiritual in its deliverance, retaining the ancestral past in presentation. The use of sacred music during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy and all other liturgical functions should reflect our Maronite heritage (Beshara, 2002).

*Iconography.* The art heritage of the Church is the physical expression of cultural diversity, reflecting the ethnic solidarity (LaHoud, 2008). Syriac art, also known as Icons, is the oldest source of portraying human religious Christian figures and manifests them with divine mystery. The structure of the Church must be so that it highlights the importance of the veneration of the holy icons and that the Church exhibits the icon in an orderly fashion that accords with the Maronite Church spirituality in a manner that befits the liturgical celebration in which they should appear (LaHoud, 2008). The Church considers the sacred art of the Church to be a sublime endeavor of the human mind and a form of faithful prayer. Sacred art (iconography) occupies great importance within the Maronite Church and maintains the heritage that has lasted over the centuries. The miniature designs on the Maronite frescoes on the walls of the churches and in the caves of the Maronite hermits are clear proof of the concern of the Maronites with artistic matters and with its theological and anthropological dimensions" (Lahoud, 2008). The Holy Synod recommends that all Maronite Churches continue this sacred art tradition to ensure that Churches, Cathedrals, or Basilicas be decorated with this art and that there be a restoration of old ones according to the criteria of the ancient Maronite liturgical tradition and its meaning (Lahoud, 2008). In efforts to preserve the heritage of the sacred art, the icon, the eparchies, and

monasteries intend to return to its sacred roots with the restorations of old icons and commission new icons to be developed (Beshara, 2002).

***Eastern architecture.*** Visual representation of the Lebanese culture and, more specifically, the Maronite rite, is rich and diverse. Traditionally, the Lebanese Maronite is a blend of both Eastern and Western cultures; however, Westernization has become a threat to this institution's cultural identity (Plourde & Khoury, 2009). The architecture of the Maronite Church is reminiscent of the architecture of centuries ago around the Middle East. The uniqueness and simplicity of the architecture reflect our roots in biblical patterns, the lifestyles of the Fathers of Jerusalem, Antioch and Edessa, and the monastic life of Saint Maron and his followers (LaHoud, 2008). Architecturally, there is an evolution from the Jewish Synagogue that served as a symbol of God's presence, as a house of prayer and a place for communal worship. The altar, oriented toward the East, is in the Church's internal architecture under the theological meaning and common Eastern tradition of the Church (Giorgione et al., 2019). The Holy Synod has recommended that the churches outside of Lebanon reflect the ancient heritage of Lebanon, eliminating all the foreign influences which are foreign to the true Maronite faith. For most Churches of the Maronite faith, the monolithic dome structure is reflective of its Eastern heritage (LaHoud, 2008).

**Maronite Rite within the Universal Catholic Church.** Similar to the sentiment of the respective value of diverse groups, the Universal Church has embraced the understanding that there is unity in diversity with the promotion of its Eastern Rites. All Catholics share in the same universal truths of the faith. However, each rite (ecclesiastical tradition of celebration) within the Church has varied ways to worship and practice. There are three significant rites in the Universal Church: The Roman, Antiochian, and Alexandrian Churches. Derived from these three main

groups are over 22 liturgical Rites that represent the Church today. The West Syriac Maronite Rite is under the Antiochian group and originated in Lebanon during the 5th century. The Maronite Rite is just one of many various rites located within the Eastern branch of the Catholic Church. As the early Church spread, it was essential for it to allow the need for each distinct culture and region to celebrate the sacraments as it would best be understood and received by the individuals for which it served (Beshara, 2002).

Every rite in use today have evolved from the liturgical practices and ecclesiastical transitions used by the distinct churches. One such ritual church is the Maronite Church established in Lebanon, founded by John Maron, later to be canonized as St. Maron. The Maronites never fell into heresy and have remained faithful to the Catholic Church since its formation. The code of Canon law demonstrates the reverence given to the Church, and the desire of the Church set out by the Second Vatican to promote unity in diversity. The Church established the Code of Canons of the Eastern Catholic Churches to demonstrate the respect it held and promote the ancient law established by these 22 Eastern rites. The code of Canon law shows the reverence given to the Church, and the desire of the Church set out by the Second Vatican to promote unity in diversity. The heart of our Eastern Code could be said to lie in canon (rule) 17 from the 1990 Code of Canons of Oriental Churches.

The Christian faithful have the right to worship God according to the prescription of their Church ... and to follow their form of spiritual life in accord with the teaching of the Church., meaning the Maronite Church has been approved by the Universal Church to worship and live in the Spirit according to the traditions and rules of its people and lands. (Beshara, 2002, p. 34).

Church law insists that all Catholics must stay faithful to their rites, which for the Maronite descends from father to children. Being the rite of one's father proved to be a barrier for the Latin Church who violated their law and encourage Lebanese to change rites. The Arab-speaking

people perceive and conceptualize reality differently than those of the West (Kayal & Kayal, 1975). It is the nature of the Arab culture to lean more towards the mystic and spiritual than does the individual who lives in Western cultures, which is more pragmatic and man controlled (Kayal, 1973).

The Roman Catholic Church is the rite (Latin Rite) that all other Rites are expected to aspire to. The apprehension of the Maronite Church having to assimilate to this majority rite is feared by many Maronite who wish to continue to have their culture as part of their faith. The work authored by Ghosn and Engebretson (2010), “National Identity of Young Australian Maronite Adults,” examines the religious influences on young Maronite Australian men’s lives, as revealed in grounded theory. This work examined how religion defines the pattern of belief and morals for these men and how it is these religious influences offer a social structure for them in their lives. This study examined the relationship between Maronite and Lebanese and the forging of identity by this distinct religious faith in second-generation males. The study concluded that the symbols, devotions, customs, and traditions unique to the Maronite Church have varied meaning and significance in the religious identity of the Maronite. The Maronite Church of Lebanon strongly supports this interrelationship between the individual’s ethnic identity formation and the church identity (Ghosn, 2010).

Being Maronite for many Lebanese American Catholics rest on the unstated acceptance of being the “other” or “ethnic Catholics”. Although the Church has recognized the Maronite Church as part of the Universal Church, there are the allowances to pull from the culture of the Church in the liturgical vernacular and visual art that distinguishes it from Latinized rites—being a relatively smaller Catholic group within such an extensive system where it is a little-known sector of the faith leaves many Maronites feeling alienated and not connected or affiliated with

the Roman Catholic Church. The Maronite Church has struggled to maintain its relevance as an Eastern rite outside of Lebanon. The Church has been given the right to retain its culture and heritage by the Universal Church; however, there remains the question if a change is needed or desired by both the Church and the faithful? With a majority of its population outside of Lebanon, the Church has had to adapt to the needs of the followers and examine its own identity to adjust.

### **Maronite Rite Church Expansion**

With the expansion of the Church outside of Lebanon, there has been a concerted effort to keep the faith alive and promote unity among the flock and continued loyalty to the motherland. Participation in a religious institution familiar to the immigrant's religious experience preserves their ethnicity by maintaining their ethnic and social networks and supporting their ethnic culture and identity (Min, 2006). When members of an ethnic group practice their native religion, they are better able to preserve their ethnicity through faith. Their religious rituals tied to elements of their culture are meaning making and are among the remaining elements of the ethnicity they desire to retain (Min, 2006). The first immigrants' experience reflected a sense of in-between-ness that postponed adaptation in their new land. The early immigrants felt stranded and wished to maintain their ethnoreligious identity to provide security and solidarity among its population (Stephan, 2009).

The persistence of ethnic traditions was firm in their attempt to overcome the sense of loss and feelings of conditional belonging. Displacement, immigration, and relocation can be a "theologizing experience" that can make religion even more salient in the new country (Herberg, 1973; Hirschman, 2004). Religion and ethnicity are deeply connected, and rebuilding their indigenous Church helped immigrants establish their ethnic identity, community, and settle in the

new land . An indicator of cultural permanence within Lebanese communities was signaled by establishing communal institutions-places of worship (Thernstrom et al., 1980). During its expansion, the elements of the Maronite Church were retained in the new lands securing the worldwide faithful attachment that would last for many generations.

The Lebanese culture in America is secular and sacred, each providing numerous markers that contribute to influencing the formation of this group's identity independent of the lands they lived (Naff, 1993). Many immigrants who arrived in America at the turn of the last century were strongly influenced by the premise that their religious affiliations tied into their ethnic identification and nationality (Naff, 1993; Suleiman, 1999). This first wave of immigration from Lebanon represents the beginning of spreading the Maronite faith from the motherland to new lands and the adaptation that it has accepted to meet the needs of members overseas continually. This distinct rite remained exclusive, undisturbed, and unchanged among the cedars in Mt. Lebanon for fifteen centuries. As an ethnoreligious group, the members did not delineate who they were simply by ancestral heritage, but rather the combination of their culture and religious affiliation. This intertwined identity brought from Lebanon served the immigrants during their integration period within the American culture and is still embedded in the group's status as witnessed with the sacred practices of the successive generations.

**Maronite preservation.** With the expansion, there has been a concerted effort to keep the faith alive, promoting unity among the flock and continued loyalty to the motherland. The Maronite Church is not universally based; instead, it remains the indigenous Church of Lebanon since its inception. This Eastern-rite Church, conceived and sustained within Lebanon for thousands of years, has traveled across the seas for its faithful this past Century. As a result, the heritage of the faith, inescapably connected to its people's culture, has expanded the culture of

the Lebanese. Answering the call of the Maronite's living overseas, the Church has reached out from Mt. Lebanon over the past Century and extended its ecclesiastical traditions of the celebration of the faith in the new land with the negligible adaptation of liturgical practices and traditions. Given this unrelenting devotion to the motherland propagated by religious affiliation, many Lebanese Americans are fully aware of the communal identity created by their ethnoreligious group's Eastern secular and sacred heritage and their sense of self and belonging in the Western culture (Ozdil,2007).

The early church presence in America represented devotion to the immigrants' strong religious beliefs and its importance in their life as new arrivals (Naff, 1993). For others, the desire to retain their sacred heritage combined with the persistent pressure to adapt to American culture forced this group to develop a hybrid religious institution. This adaptation resulted in spiritual communities that contained the institutions, traditions, and customs of the old country and ethnic heritage, with added new aspects that were characterized by the adjustments to their new land. The Church was a solid fixture in the communities and was the only means of preserving their social and ethnic identity. It served as generations of acculturation into the American way of life for the preceding generations. In particular, the established communities allowed for the continued fellowship of ethnic-religious practices and traditions as the primary purpose of cultural reinforcements such as traditional foods, music, language, and folk customs that preserved Lebanese existence outside of its native land. This combination of spiritual heritage and community building that promoted ethnic preservation heightened the attraction and participation in churches for the new and successive generations in America. The transplanted Church in America continues to operate overall as a separate ethnic enclave of society,

influencing the religious experience for the members who have adapted to the host society and its customs and culture.

**Sustainability during expansion.** The short history of this Eastern Rite in America pales compared to Lebanon's long ecclesial history and existence. As a result, the sustainability of the American Maronite Churches is questionable. Perpetuating its responsibility and obligation to Maronites worldwide, the Church continues maintaining its pure form in the same ecclesial tradition of celebration and practices that have been cherished for over sixteen centuries. The Church has remained relatively ethnic in its language, dress, structures, methods, and theology, within a society that encourages the assimilation of its congregational members. This Syriac rite of the Church was conceived in Lebanon, sustained within her Mountains for thousands of years, and has traveled across the seas for its people over the past Century. It remains, by most definition, the Church of Lebanon. As a result, the heritage of the faith is inescapably connected to the culture of its people. The church members have traveled across the seas over the past century, bringing their beliefs and values with them and reconstructing this faith in a new land as an attempt to preserve it for future generations. The transference of the faith to new countries results in an additional need for the Church to bring the Lebanese heritage while adapting to the Western world. In America, the Maronite Church had to take on a new role. No longer could it merely provide spiritual guidance and comfort; it had to adapt its language and position as the gatekeeper of heritage. The Church has moved from being primarily a religious community to one that maintains the cultural aspect of the Lebanese American (Leichtman, 2013).

The Church is rooted in the Lebanese culture, which supported its longevity before its expansion. The role of the Maronite Church in Lebanon is to provide the ancient spiritual service to meet the needs of its members; culture was non-negotiable. In America, this is not the case.



The culture is that of America for many of the members. As a result, the role of the Church has expanded willingly or unwillingly to meet the cultural needs of the American members. In its quality of being a place for both sacred and secular culture raises the question if the maintenance of the Church among the subsequent generations far removed from Lebanon derives meaning from its spiritual relevance or is it merely a means of connecting to the inherited heritage (Labaki, 2014). The issue of relevance rests in the understanding of the value of the faith-based community as a spiritual entity and a secular cultural institution. The Church has moved from merely being a spiritual community to one that maintains the Lebanese American cultural elements. The distinguishing boundary between passing on heritage and fulfilling the members' spiritual needs becomes blurred.

**Maronite Church expansion in South America.** Although many Lebanese came to shore in the United States, these numbers were pale compared to the still higher number of Lebanese Christians who immigrated to South America. There is an estimate of over 7 million Lebanese descendants living in Brazil, the largest Lebanese population outside Lebanon. In work by M. Pitts, the study of the Lebanese in this South American country, the exchange of cultural influences is noted and studied. Like the immigrant community that came to America with a strong religious identity, Brazilian Lebanese transported their culture and faith to their new homeland (Pitts, 2006). Unlike America, the conversion was not mandatory for acceptance into the majority culture. Like most immigrants in other host countries, many Lebanese attended Latin Rite services, changed their names to seem more Brazilian, and better fit (Pitts, 2006).

Assimilating was easier for the immigrants to the South American countries, facilitated by similarity in religious beliefs, cultural values, and physical features and appearance. South America's assimilation was not a slow and arduous process. As a result, the decreased ethnic

identity was painless for most. Evident in the ease and speediness of adaptation, Maronites were not actively involved in the maintenance of the Lebanese identity, rather forgoing its presence in their lives in favor of the Latin religious and cultural identity (Pitts, 2006). Based upon the delineation of the sacred culture of the Brazilian Lebanese is evident in the minimal number of Maronite Churches found within the nation (5 churches), located in this country that has such a large Lebanese population (Roberts, 2003). This small number of formed Maronite Churches is notable compared to America with over 80 churches but half the population. In Brazil, the Maronite Rite has lost all its ethnic-religious distinctness. The churches in South America resemble the dominant Latin Rite churches in most areas of distinctions. The Maronite Churches are similar in architecture to the Roman Catholic structures, and Portuguese liturgical language (Pitts, 2006). In most of these structures, the only distinguishing Eastern rite feature is St. Maron statues found in each Church. Although the sacred music is in Arabic, an acoustic guitar accompanies it within the Brazilian churches, a stark contrast to the cymbals used throughout the world in other churches.

Pitts (2006) hypothesizes that the lack of Maronite Churches in Brazil contributes to the decrease in identity formation among this group compared to the strong ethnic identity found among the Orthodox Lebanese (non-Catholic). The Orthodox Lebanese erected churches immediately upon arrival to meet the needs of its non- catholic population. Members of the Orthodox community were much slower to assimilate than their counterparts the Maronites (Pitts, 2006). Pitts (2006) speculates the ease of assimilation for the Maronites was due to closely aligned culture and religious identities. The Lebanese and Brazilian cultural similarities allowed the Maronites' quick integration into the Brazilian culture and have moved away from their own ethnic and religious identities brought by the immigrants a century ago (Pitts, 2006).

**Global expansion.** This wide range of regional locations is best explained due to the large number of countries the Lebanese immigrant initially located, the most prominent of which includes South America, Australia. Each provided a rich illustration and narrative to the concept of the interaction between the religious practices within the Maronite Church and ethnic and cultural identity of the Lebanese groups. In a paper by Paul Tabar (2005), it spoke of a similar distinct cultural practice, the folkloric dance the dabke, as deriving from social processes that surround its production and it being a metaphor for Lebanese identity and the Lebanese have a sense of complete ownership. The dabke is a village dance performed in a group chain, symbolizing solidarity, associated, egalitarianism, and unity (Tabar, 2005). The performance of the dabke is determined to be a means of generating a sense of group belonging and obtain symbolic power in an alienating environment, transporting their homeland to the sensory domain in their dance (Tabar, 2005). The Maronite Church is similar in being a metaphor for culture. It is a religious practice that is closely tied to culture and is continuously recreated by the priest and the parish members through its unique representations and symbols of Lebanon. This construction and reconstruction of the distinct Rite assume a specific characteristic of the migrant experiences of displacement and social exclusion both within the society and the Catholic Church. The Lebanese American inscribes their experience using their religious experience to connect their past with their present. For many Lebanese Americans, the Maronite Church provides the only place where they can learn about their secular and sacred heritage of their homeland.

### **Ethnic Churches in the United States**

Ethnic churches are treasured parts of American society. As such, gaining a better understanding of different churches would allow a greater understanding of how these churches

can preserve their own identity while fulfilling the identity needs of the participants. Ethnic-religious institutions are just one of the social institutions that are impacted by assimilation. The fate of these churches rests in its ability to adapt to remain relevant to the subsequent generations (without losing its own identity in the process) to retain relevance or face extinction (Hirschman, 2004; Mullins, 1987).

The phenomenon of religion in the construction of identity has been given a minimal amount of attention. Although there is a limited amount of work focusing on the Middle Eastern Christian culture, there are numerous studies on this topic as related to religious assimilation of other cultures and races. In this study the issue of ethnic religion sustainability concerning assimilation experience among the second generation was explored. Chong posits that when a non-White ethnic group is faced with issues of marginalization within their society caused by the racial status of the group they belong to, the ethnic Church can play a significant role in the group member's search for identity among the second generation (Chong, 1997). Chong's work states that Christianity plays a vital role in constructing, supporting, and reinforcing ethnic identity in second generations. Chong's aim in her work was to examine the ethnic churchgoers to develop a better understanding of how the cultural attributes of this ethnic group (Koreans) were appropriated and utilized by the members in their identity-making process and the role religion plays in this process. To investigate motivation driving ethnic church attendance, she visited two Korean churches in Chicago. Based on her work, the most common reason for church attendance among second-generation Koreans was the importance of social and cultural aspects offered by the ethnic church community. The need for this reinforcement of their ethnic identity was found to be due to awareness in early adulthood, possibly brought on by an identity crisis brought on by perceptions of racism, prejudice, and discrimination. The ethnic Church was an

opportunity to reproduce their culture and provided socialization and feelings of belonging (group consciousness). The attendance patterns are a means of gaining a form of “tangible” ethnicity for the second-generation Korean. The ethnic religion provided a powerful religious basis for the traditional ethnic values many were exposed to within their homes and became a venue for specific markers in their ethnic identity (Chong, 1997).

**Life cycle of ethnic churches.** There have been a limited number of studies on the topic of ethnic churches in America. This is an exciting fact because American history is built upon the contributions of a variety of ethnic groups that have added to the backdrop of the cultural milieu of this society (Herberg, 1973). These immigrants brought with them not only a varied means of dress, language, and norms, more importantly, but they also brought with them the customs and traditions often instilled into their lives from their religious practices and belief systems. One study does approach the understanding of the importance of examining the life cycle of ethnic churches. Ethnic churches are churches that are created by a group of individuals that share cultural, ethnic histories, have a congregation that is mostly composed of members of the same ethnic group. This celebrant is foreign-born or of the same ethnic population and with a clear ecumenical presentation. These churches, often established by the immigrant population, are transient for the most part. To support this idea, a study was conducted by Mullins (1987), which focuses on the life cycle of ethnic churches. The author presents a model to explain the paths the ethnic church experience and the impact of a changing population as a result of assimilation. In this framework, Mullins proposes that ethnic churches are adaptive organizations, established to fulfill the needs of the immigrant and changing along with the subsequent generations to maintain relevance. During the first stage, the “services and activities are naturally dominated by the language and clergy from the old country” (Mullins, 1987, p.

323). By the second generation, the language and clergy are no longer identifiable by the congregations. As the subsequent generations continue to move away from the ethnic Church, due to assimilation, into the host society, the Church must adapt. If the ethnic Church does not adapt to follow the assimilated congregant, they face inevitable extinction. Adaption of the Church often results in lost religious identity that distinguished it from the other religious institutions available in society. This adaption is a short-term fix and, in many ways, a maladaptation that could alter the institution's original purpose. For this reason, many ethnic churches have a short life span in America.

This work explores an alternative path available for ethnic churches in a pluralistic society such as America, beyond adaptation or extinction. Beyond what was once the norm for survival in a host society—abandonment of ethnic identity with institutional and individual assimilation—this work examines a third option available to ethnic churches, as demonstrated by this faith-based community. Whereas in the past, ethnic churches were transitional, this work demonstrates the perceived continued need for such institutions that provide a bridge between the ancestral lands and America for the subsequent generations retaining a strong sense of their ethnic selves as integrated Americans. Instead of losing their sacred identity to avoid extinction, ethnic churches could remain relevant in the competitive religious market by retaining their uniqueness without compromising their sacred integrity as distinct religious institutions to fit in American society. This study not only explores varied paths for ethnic churches but also adds to the body of existing works that have examined immigrant and second-generation ethnic groups and the impact of assimilation on ethnic-religious practices, as applied to the third- and fourth-generation congregants.

**Religious attendance patterns among ethnic subsequent generations.** Herberg (1973)

posited that the generation level and the religious denomination impact subsequent generations' attendance patterns. In this work, he states that religious communities serve as a context of self-identification and social location when the immigrant and subsequent generation adapt to the contemporary American life and that these communities provide a place where the individual can understand their place within this society. It is supported that second-generation desire to avoid identification with ethnic culture and pull away from the ethnic community, which often centered on religious institutions associated with the ethnic community from which it serves, in an attempt to assimilate quickly and gain social acceptance. Herberg refers to this phenomenon as a generation hypothesis, in which the tendency to gauge the extent of an immigrants group adjustment to American life by the individual reflected in their level of religious activity (Herberg, 1973). By the third generation, he theorized that the individual fully assimilates and begins to show interest in religion from a thoroughly Americanized perspective, adapting to the American religious patterns of behavior and American religious norms and practices.

Patterns resemble the same level of active participation and importance as the immigrant group's interest level. However, the American perspective allows for a new image of religion, no longer perceived as "foreign" but rather "American" based on American religious institutions' role in the American culture. The Church is no longer an all-encompassing social and psychological retreat for the individuals but a place of worship only and does not negatively impact their assimilation process. Being part of the American religious institutions validate their assimilation into American society. As a result of acceptance into the American Church, there is further loss of contact with the ethnic-religious traditions that were treasured by the previous generations. Herberg predicts that when there is the retention of ethnic-religious practices, it is

merely symbolic and rather thin without serious commitment, without real inner conviction, and genuine existential decisions. This relationship is termed symbolic religiosity by Herberg (1973). Symbolic religiosity is the path that all ethnic groups take related to religious patterns among successive generations who have integrated into American society and have accepted the American religious institutions and norm.

Nelsen and Allen (1974) expand upon this concept and looked at the specific patterns of subsequent generations as it relates to the Catholic Churches in America. This theory states that there are two trends in the pattern of Americanization among immigrant groups. One trend involving decreased second-generation religious interest due to alienation from the ethnic tradition. Another trend was showing an increase in attendance at worshiping services from first to the second generation due to the prominence of religion in American culture. Referencing Herberg's generation hypotheses (1960), speculated that second-generation attendance pattern depends on the extent of differences between the ethnic and the dominant American cultures. It concluded that the ethnic churches far removed from the Anglo-Saxon traditions had an extended time in losing contact with their ethnic faith than those closely aligned to the Anglo-Saxon way of worship. Countries further removed from the Anglo-Saxon ideal generationally held by American, there was a decrease from first to second generations. Immigrants from Western Europe showed evidence of a pattern of increase in attendance in the second generation; while immigrants from southern Europe showed evidence in a decrease. In this work, the findings stressed that Catholics of extractions most resembling this Anglo-Saxon idea evidence an increase in church attendance from first to second generations because they interpret their religion as compatible with the American values' dominant system. The more an individual accepts the American societal norms and culture, the more likely they are to accept its religious



practices (Nelsen & Allen, 1974). Following this line of thinking, the Maronite Rite, with its distinct religious traditions and practices, is very far removed from the Anglo-Saxon ideal of religion. This can hamper the religious patterns of the subsequent generations towards Americanized religious patterns. However, there would need to be a halting of ethnic church attendance as a means of rejecting ethnicity for adaption into the American religious ideal as a fully assimilated individual. By retaining ethnic-religious patterns, this would imply that the individual does not accept the American religious ideal, which has a shaping influence on the assimilation process.

In a related study, “Pathways of Religious Assimilation: Second Generation Asian Americans Religious Retention and Religiosity,” Chen and Park (2019) spoke of religious assimilation of second-generation religious groups by examining rates of religious retention and levels of religiosity of the first generation and among the broader American population. The focus was on how racial and religious deference mediates assimilation into American religion. This study showed a considerable amount of evidence that second-generation ones are leaving their inherited religious traditions due to the challenges of assimilation. For this group, the alienation through ethnic, religious practices sets them apart from the White mainstream. With the abandonment of their religious heritage, it creates a space between their parents’ culture. This work explores how racial and religious differences mediate the assimilation of the second generation into the American religious landscape. Findings from the study are that there is a decrease of religiosity among second-generation relative to the first generation and that second-generation has lower retention rates than the first generation. The high rates of religious disaffiliation among second-generation Asian Americans compared to the generational population suggest that the second generation is not religiously assimilated into the American

religious landscape by bypassing it altogether. It would expect second-generation Asian Americans to retain their parent's religious affiliation, join White mainstream religious congregations, and assimilate toward their co-religionists' religiosity levels in the generational population. This study shows how this is unclear, and whether structural assimilation extends to religious assimilation among Asian Americans as it did for the earlier White ethnic who became White. This study counters Herberg's theory that assimilating ethnic groups might still find a source of pride and identity among immigrant congregants and are ambivalent in joining mainstream congregations.

In a similar study relating to subsequent generation attendance patterns, "The Three Generations Hypothesis," Lazerwitz and Rowitz (1964), state that by the third generation the ethnic Church serves as a means of revisiting their inherited religious faith to counter the "emotionally cold, urban-industrial complex society" presented as a result of assimilation. Far removed from societal handicaps presented to their immigrant grandparents and parents of the first generation, the third generation is free to look back to select how they identify within the society. For many, this may be through symbolic markers such as ancestral linens, foods, and dress, and for some, it is represented in unique religious worship patterns. For many, this may be ineffective since, by the second generation, these churches have adapted and transformed to meet the second generation's needs. The occupant of the pulpit is no longer a representative of the ethnic group, and the congregation assimilated middle-class Americans. These third-generation desires to reassert their inherited religious faith only to be met with a diluted intuition. This study concludes that previous studies focused on male assimilation and impact on ethnic-religious practices, whereas female congregants have a less rapid move from ethnic churches. Since this study was mid-century, it could be that the new perspective of the female American as an

individual was noteworthy in this area of study. The emphasis on urban dwellers and urban anomie related to religious affiliation to offset industrialized society is slightly outdated. However, the study did raise fascinating points about what happens to the churchgoer who wants ethnic revival through religious attendance practices but is unfulfilled when the Church of their ancestors has transformed and diluted to become merely American churches with the same traits.

In a study by Saade (2012), “Maronite Identity and Commitment to the Maronite community,” Lebanese American attendance patterns were examined. This quantitative case study was conducted in Utica, New York. The Maronite population at this site is a cross-generation with very few new immigrants. The data collection method was a survey that asked participants to state the importance of the Maronite Church in Utica, with 98% stating it was important to them. It is explored the role of the strong sense of Maronite identity has allowed the community to remain connected. It is through the similar culture of the Church and the members that build this strong bond, for the teachings of the Maronite rite align with the Lebanese social identity. The importance of religious identity is likely because it encompasses other parts of life. The essence of Maronite spirituality is living one’s life in imitating Christ’s life by being self-sacrificing and without asking anything in return. Maronite heritage, culture, and traditions, like Maronite spirituality, are community-focused with hard work and hospitality. The traditional emphasis on family and faith is reflected in their culture. The traditional emphasis on family and faith is related to their culture. The hardships necessitated by harsh conditions this group had experienced in the past resulted in the need to stick together led to a tight-knit community. Findings show how it is theoretically possible for racial formation to embody identifications and ideologies. Moreover, how racial constructions are discursively formed with religious ideologies, frameworks, and identities.

In a comprehensive longitudinal study performed by Rossi and Scappini (2010), there is the topic of measuring church attendance and how this impact the understanding of patterns of attendance represented in many studies. The accepted means of measuring attendance is through density indicators, which does not provide a clear picture of the distribution of the different levels, so attendance in a population and the term “frequency” category allow for a wide variance. Because of the variables such as density, self-selection of subjects, data collection method, and terminology, it is difficult to determine the religious attendance patterns of individuals used as a standardized gauge of attendance in America. These inaccurate descriptors are applicable to this study based upon the measuring tool and terminology used in the pre-interview survey. Also, density should be reviewed based on the data gathered from observation. It is noted that during observation of church services, there was a significant population representation of third and fourth generation congregants. This observation, combined with church records of families listed as parishioners, formulated the conclusion that the church congregation is predominately made up of successive generations with a small majority of immigrants and non-Lebanese members.

### **Chapter III: Conceptual Framework**

#### **Introduction**

This study utilizes prominent theoretical concepts related to the phenomenon of the Maronite Church's role among successive generations. Applicable theories include assimilation, acculturation, and symbolic ethnicity as well as theories relating to identity formation related to the individual, group, and institutions. Also relevant in the study of this phenomenon is the understanding of the capacity of the members and the church as it looks to maintaining relevancy.

The studies pulled and reviewed for this work provided a comprehensive example of different ethnic groups, including Lebanese and Arab groups, from various regional locations in the United States and supplementary countries. This wide range of regional locations is the result of the many countries the Lebanese immigrant located to, the most prominent of which includes South America, Australia. Each provided a vibrant illustration and rich narrative to the concept of the interaction between the religious practices within the Maronite Church and ethnic and cultural identity of the Lebanese. The research performed for this work, includes a broad area of study, including the Maronite Church and its formation in America, religious identification among the Lebanese, the concept of generating identity among the Lebanese in America from the construct of assimilation, acculturation and self- identity formation, and the future of the Maronite Church in America. There has been only one study relating to this topic, and it was the ethnic identity of immigrant Maronite (Khachan, 2015). This study is an expansion on this topic as it deals with the successive generations. The literature's role was facilitated by adopting a reflexive stance and incorporating revisiting these sources as part of the analytic process applied to each interview transcript. The literature sources were also utilized during the coding process

when determining each theory's relevance to the data collected. The inclusion of the literature in this manner facilitates the coding of the dimensions and variations within each category. The theories supporting the study are all interrelated when looking at this case. Forms of identity-based on social, ethnic, and religious realities are shared in the heritage of the population, binding these complex constructs of identification as one, creating a distinctly unique identity. The trifecta foci are on religion, ethnic and social identity and define the cultural characteristics centered on the Maronite faith-based community structure. The combination of all constructs of identity sustained through religious affiliation is the means of self-identification of the group separate from other groups. Most adaption or assimilation theories focus on the second generation; however, they are still relevant because the impact would logically extend to subsequent generations in theory. Because this case sample is far removed from ancestral ties by at least three generations, the continued membership at this Church could be perceived as merely "symbolic". In which relevance is created by the members out of nostalgia or desire to remember a heritage that was valued by their grandparents and great-grandparents. The explanation for continued loyalty to their ancestors' ethnic, religious practices and traditions is best explained through identity formation, social, ethnic, and religious. It is plausible that the Maronite identity created from social, ethnic, and religious identities is an amalgamation of characteristics adapted to fit the needs of this sample seeking to answer the question of "Who am I." The relationship of each identity theory's relevance can vary depending on the individual, the group, and the institution's intrinsic value placed on each concept.

In summary, the theories explored in this study are all relevant when examining Maronite's case. The sample population is a successive generation, which has demonstrated complete structural assimilation and, at the same time, retained their ethnic, religious practices.

Although the literature on this topic was scarce, it provided a foundation from which this study could be built upon as it progressed. This work aims to produce truths that can add to the existing sources in a scholarly manner, which catalyzes other studies in the pursuit of an understanding of this unique group and allegiance to an ethnic, religious institution.

### **Assimilation**

From this theoretical perspective, it is best to have a clear understanding of this construct and the impact on ethnic and social identity as it applies to the population sample and institution. Assimilation theories predict the decline of ethnicity, if not complete disappearance over time. The basic underlying theme of assimilation is one of integration and absorption within the host society of immigrants. Assimilation is a process that differs based on race, ethnicity, and religion. Depending on these variables, it may be a smooth linear process or hampered by xenophobia, ethnocentrism, and religious bias (Gordon, 1961). Anglo-conformity is a term that is often applied to the concept of assimilation, assuming desirability of the English institutions and language-oriented cultural patterns (Gordon, 1961). After World War I, “Americanization” was coined to describe assimilation as the process that stripped the immigrant and subsequent generations of ethnic characteristics and cultural attachments. In 1961, Gordon postulated several stages that follow the acquisition of culture and language and integration into the host society. First is structural assimilation (close social relations with the host society), followed by large-scale intermarriage; ethnic identification with the host society; and the ending of prejudice, discrimination, and value conflict.

Assimilation can be a slower process for some immigrant groups, variance depending on the group’s similarities to their new country. The theories of assimilation and acculturation among newcomers have been of interest to many within the field of sociology for many decades,

varying views of this topic going in and out of favor depending on the sociological thinking prevalent at the time. Many early theorists, classical assimilation theorists, saw immigrant or ethnic groups as becoming accustomed to the new land in a straight-line convergence, moving towards the complete alteration of oneself towards the adoption of the host society's culture and norms. The end goal of classical assimilation was to eliminate past identity and culture through absorption into the new country's culture. In America, this was completed upon the acceptance into the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant middle class. Milton argued that the first step in assimilation was structural assimilation (close social contact and relation with host society), followed by large-scale assimilation through intermarriage. This assimilation was a merger of the individual's ethnic identity with the host country's norms and values, intending to become more similar over time to the host society's norms, values, beliefs, and characteristics (Brown & Bean, 2006). The identity they arrived at the host country would no longer be a different facet in their self-image, and they could then prosper from the advantages of the middle class. Thus, postulated that those immigrants who resided the longest in America would show more significant similarities to American norms and values only as a natural occurrence of time spent in the host land. Those who spent less time would in accordance show minimal assimilation. The end goal of assimilation was conformity, to be fully incorporated and integrated into the Anglo-Protestant American culture (Gordon, 1961). Anglo conformity was fully expressed during the early 20th century, the same time the Lebanese immigration was at its highest.

At this time, Americanization aimed at stripping the flood of immigrants of their culture and moves them towards the unified culture of America with Anglo-Saxon righteousness undertones. At this time, American history, including these new immigrants and their different cultures, went against what America stood for. In promoting Americanism, instilling the Anglo-



Saxon culture would ideally bring the inferior breed up to American standards (Gordon, 1961). White Anglo-Saxon Protestant became the identity that all newcomers were to strive for, and the ideology of assimilation made its mark on America's historical experience (Gordon, 1961). Over time the American-born Lebanese were primarily English speaking and less sectarian in their interest. They were eager to succeed in their new land, whereas their elders had hampered by their cultural differences. Many of their children entered in the larger American society with relatively little psychological stress. By the mid-century, prosperity had occurred, the English language was the home language, and inter-ethnic marriages were commonplace. The successive generation members of the Maronite Churches in America have, for the most part, gained access to other social institutions (structural assimilation), and most have even had access to marital assimilation with intermarriage. Most Lebanese immigrant men from the first wave of immigration returned to Lebanon for their wives; by 1910, only 6% of children were the product of a mixed marriage. The figure rose to 8 percent in 1920 and has increased rapidly over the decades. This high intermarriage level is much higher than the other immigrants who arrived at the same time in history (Orfalea, 2006).

**Behavioral assimilation.** In behavioral assimilation the group or individual adopts the external behaviors, such as dress, mannerism, and speech, of the host country. This external adoption was a very common construct of alteration for many early immigrants, and most groups go through external assimilation in the public domain with ease. For many ethnic groups arriving in America, religious traditions and practices were closely tied to their ethnic identity and abandoning this part of who they were as demanding and arduous. Gordon's seven dimensions of assimilation theory are relevant to this study. It is a conceptual scheme that proves to be useful when studying ethnicity without the need for complete convergence into the American culture.

There are many Lebanese Americans who have achieved full assimilation; however, the group for which selected have, by this definition, have completed or modified their assimilation as evidence in their affiliation with the Maronite Church. Classic assimilation theory predicts that intermarriage or out marriage can occur in a continuant process.

The Maronite Church offers not only traditional ethnic sacred heritage but also the availability of cultural renewal and celebration found within its tightly knit community through symbolic markers such as language, music, food, and architecture, which are familiar to the participant. The Church allows the participants to continue a distinctive heritage in a space designated to practice heritage that is considered relatively normal safely. Participants do not forfeit the image of being White Christian Americans through their association. Also, relevant to the study of the Lebanese is the theory of ethnic identity. The third and fourth generations utilize participation in the Maronite Church as a form of reconnection to ancestral heritage while remaining fully integrated socially, economically, and psychologically in the American culture. A member's affiliation with the ethnic religion does not "block" assimilation; instead, it can be viewed more like a "nostalgic" act (Gans, 1979). The Maronite Church, in its practices and traditions, is a means from which an individual can revitalize personal needs for ethnic solidarity and heritage renewal. Maintaining and revitalizing the Lebanese cultural heritage within the walls of the Church offers solace for many wishing to stay in touch with Lebanese culture that many refuse to give up. Selective ethnicity (Gans, 1979) lets the individual determine how they assimilate, to what extent, and redefine what it means to be Lebanese in America.

Acculturation. Acculturation or behavioral assimilation conceptualized initially as a unidimensional process in which retention of the heritage culture and acquisition of the receiving culture cast as opposing ends of a single continuum (Gordon, 1961). According to this

unidimensional model, as migrants acquired the values, practices, and beliefs of their new homelands, they were expected to discard those from their cultural heritage. Most assimilation theories focus on the first generations of immigrants and newcomers, eluding the later descendants. The acculturative process is impacted, for example, by the reasons for immigration, the historical period during which the migration occurred, education and socioeconomic levels, family functioning, and social support. Acculturation often is referred to as the changes that occur when groups or individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original patterns of either or both groups. Assimilation and acculturation are a slow process, and it approached not as a group process but a process that occurs within groups among individuals. Assimilation and acculturation have never been straight. It waves and wiggles depending on the group's adherence to their own secular and sacred identity markers. Each group and individuals within a group go about the process in their irregular way.

Another applicable acculturation theory relating to this study was arrived at by Berry (2001). Acculturation is a process of cultural change resulting from contact between two or more ethnic groups (Berry, 2001). After first generations, with imposed ethnicity, struggled to integrate into the American culture, the following generations have followed in this process of integration and adaptation with symbolic ethnicity as a means of preserving their past connection to their heritage. This new kind of ethnic identity is a continuation of assimilation and voluntary behavior on the part of the post immigrant generation (Gans, 2007). Individuals tend to rely on co-ethnic networks and expressions of racial/ethnic solidarity less for instrumental reasons than to fulfill expressive, individualistic needs. For them, racial/ethnic identification has become relatively optional. Acculturation is a process of cultural change resulting from contact between

two or more ethnic groups (Berry, 2001). The Lebanese immigrant classified as Caucasian/White due to useful legal cases dating back to the early 1900s. As a result, many immigrants and subsequent generations have retained this classification and have eschewed this White identity as a means of assimilation and acceptance in their host country (Adjrouch & Jamal, 2007; Cainkar, 2006; Kayyali, 2013; Suleiman, 2001). A variety of social forces shapes ethnic self-definition. At times, there are complex, conflictive, and unpredictable ways in which acculturation can affect and complicate an individual's identity process. Reactive ethnicity is when assimilation halts due to the perceived threats, persecution, discrimination, and exclusion of an ethnic group (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). This view contrasts with conventional thinking concerning ethnic acculturation, conceived as a linear process of stages that dilutes ethnic self-identities over time as the group adopts the host country's ways (Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006). In Milton Gordon's model, identification assimilation (self-definition as un-hyphenated America- is only possible if the process is absent of prejudices and discrimination in the society (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006).

Gordon's (1964) work speaks of acculturation as the adoption of America's patterns and is the first stage of assimilation. Acculturation extends beyond the learning of a new language and continues to dress habits and outward personal values. Gordon does not believe that fundamental abandonment of religious identities as a result of acculturation. Gordon distinguishes intrinsic cultural traits, which are vital ingredients of the groups' cultural heritage (such as religion and music) from extrinsic characteristics that are less central to group identity. Gordon implied in his work that with the distinction that intrinsic traits are more valued and cherished than extrinsic characteristics that are readily surrendered, partial assimilation is achieved (1964). Although Gordon's work has often been disputed due to the overbearing

premise of being Anglo-centric, it still has theoretical relevance when determining assimilation and adaptation in America.

**Segmented assimilation.** There are two views on assimilation, the classic and the later segmented assimilation developed in the latter part of the 20th century. Segmented assimilation theory posits three outcomes for the second generation, upward assimilation, downward assimilation, and upward mobility combined with persistent biculturalism (Waters & Jimenez, 2005). Segmented assimilation developed three decades after the straight-line or classic assimilation theory was a more relevant model of assimilation developed by Portes and Rumbaut (2006). The theorist argued that the different outcomes are different upon each successive generation. Each of these paths coincides with the relations between immigrant children, their parents, and the wider ethnic community. Portes and Rumbaut stated that members of consecutive generations could rise to society and its institutions or join in ranks of racialized, impoverished populations at lower social status. The third path of segmented assimilation is the process that leads to upward assimilation and biculturalism. This process is known as selective acculturation purported to be when the parents and children gradually learn American ways while remaining embedded in the ethnic community. The success of the process is determined when parents and children appreciate the need and benefits for assimilation and the need to retain their ethnic connection with parents and community. To become American is a multigenerational process and requires various levels of socialization and adaptation within new settings and situations at each level of assimilation. This theory, developed to address the perspective of economic disadvantage and impact on assimilation, explores how structural barriers in society could postpone or block the linear assimilation process in the less advantaged immigrant group. This barrier could lead to a downward progression in assimilation rather than upward mobility

often associated with assimilation. To offset the negative assimilation process, identifying structural, cultural, and contextual barriers that lead to stagnation or unsuccessful assimilation should occur (Portes & Zhou, 1993). Unlike the original study's European counterparts, the second study performed with non-Whites showed that even when the second generation attempted to enter the White middle-class society, by the abandonment of ethnic communities and ethnic heritage, they still were unable to join the middle class and be accepted. Because this lack of entry was present, many remain in co-ethnic communities, which allow them access to needed resources and support systems (Portes & Zhou, 1993).

This group of immigrants imbued this feeling of temporariness upon their Maronite communities, which in some instances resulted in downward assimilation or stagnation of the community for the next generation. The Lebanese American Maronite has maintained the status of Americanization while reimagining the ethnic heritage, which is distinct to their religious culture. Retention of ethnic identity as Americans is possible with religious place-making, as specified in the segmented assimilation theory. Segmenting or halting assimilation is possible without loss to the individual. The place-making enables the individual to alter the assimilation process selectively without interruption in all other areas of life.

**Symbolic ethnicity.** While assimilation and acculturation have a more substantial effect on the secular culture, it can impact the sacred culture maintained and visible during this process. As a result, religion eventually becomes the marker for many future generations to turn to during their ethnic identity process. The underlying premise of assimilation is to eliminate an individual's ethnicity and that this process is irreversible once accomplished. This notion of forever relinquishing one's claim to ancestral heritage is challenged by Herbert Gans (1979) with the development of his Symbolic Identity theory. Herbert Gans challenges this notion of forever

relinquishing one's claim to ancestral heritage with the development of the concept of symbolic ethnicity expressed by the subsequent generations.

In Herbert Gans (1979) work, this less than a straight-line course of assimilation is acceptable and within normal for the assimilation process. Gans' theory of symbolic ethnicity (1979) does not conflict with the traditionally accepted theory of linear assimilation. Instead, it explains this phenomenon as being a continuation as a result of previous generations' behavior. For even though by the third-generation acculturation and assimilation have occurred for most, ethnic ties are still present, and the proceeding generations continue to perceive themselves as being ethnic, whether they define ethnicity in sacred or secular behaviors. These generations are less concerned about maintaining ethnic identity. Instead, they voluntarily and deliberately maintain their ethnic identity as it relates to their feelings of belonging. Ethnic identity behavior extends beyond the ethnic groups, and what goes on within this group; it also is concerned about how society treats their groups presently and, in the future (ethnic scapegoat).

Symbolic identity is not so much how the individual chooses to identify him or herself or retain their ethnic identity; instead, it is about how the assimilated individual chooses to express their ethnic identity or to negotiate their identity to fit their self-identity. Gans' symbolic ethnicity relevance is apparent when exploring Maronite Churches and successive generation membership. It allows for the idea that assimilation can occur with the return to ethnic identity after assimilation is complete. The assimilation of an individual or group can be altered or delayed by contextual features in the host society, producing a resuscitated interest in ethnicity among immigrant groups or successive generations. After several generations, ethnic individuals or groups may become stagnant in the process. This plateau returns or adopts a voluntary symbolic ethnicity without a penalty in their assimilation process or within society. This revival

or restoration of ethnic affiliation is an expression of ethnic solidarity for the fulfillment of expressive and individualistic needs and is optional and not detrimental (Gans, 1979).

Assimilation is still a dominant force within the group or individual, even with the return to ethnic customs and norms; ethnicity is allowed to reenter into the person's life even after the third or fourth generations. Hardly an individual was unaffected by the assimilation process. The following generations were only willing to maintain certain aspects of their culture if it did not conflict with the new American life. Areas, which showed most compatibility, included cultural markers as the food, limited language, dance, and observance of religious holidays at a Maronite Church. By the third and fourth generations, the first wave of ancestral identity was so far removed and skewed it no longer was viable or marked. However, there is evidence that although many, if not most immigrants and first-generation Lebanese, adapted quickly into American culture, there remained an intense level of ethnic pride and desire to observe the traditions and heritage of their motherland as evident in the continued formation of Maronite communities across America.

After first generations, with imposed ethnicity, struggled to integrate into the American culture, the following generations have followed in this process of integration and adaptation with symbolic ethnicity as a means of preserving their past connection to their heritage. This new kind of ethnic identity is a continuation of assimilation and voluntary behavior on the part of the post immigrant generation (Gans, 2007). In "Reconstructing Jewish Identity in Croatia: Towards a Refined Symbolic Ethnicity." Hofman (2001) examines the self-identity or image of Croatian Jews (including cultural and religious cores) and image projected on them by others. Self-image based on cultural and religious differences is pronounced in the expressed identity and is a broader dimension than previous studies have examined. Hofman supports the need for



expansion of the symbolic identity model to include historical images, collective and individual meanings, and local and global influences (Hofman, 2001). Symbolic identity is not how the individual chooses to identify him or herself or retain their ethnic identity. However, instead, it is about how the assimilated individual wants to express their ethnic identity or to negotiate their identity to fit their self-identity. This ethnic identity model is useful when examining the consequential generations of immigrants and has proven to be a reliable measure of ethnic identity for many ethnic populations.

### **Identity Development: Religious, Ethnic, and Social Identity**

The terms ethnic and ethnicity have their roots in the Greek word *ethnos*, which describes a community of common descent. The process of ethnic identity is how individuals come to understand the implications of their ethnicity and make decisions about its role in their lives. (Phinney, 1993). Social identity theory aims to specify and predict the circumstances under which individuals think of themselves as individuals or group members. The theory also considers the consequences of personal and social identities for individual perceptions and group behavior (Tajfel & Turner, 1982). Social identity is the knowledge that one belongs to certain social groups, together with some emotional and value significance of the group membership. Stets and Burkes' (2000) work, *Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory*, expanded on the concept of social identity to include self-categorization. Self-categorization is when the self is reflexive and can take "itself as an object and categorize, classify or name itself in particular ways with other social categories or classifications." (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 226).

Religious beliefs and rituals bind individuals together and provide the social context necessary to transmit traditions and values (Durkheim, 1965). When tied to social identity, religious identity can be formed when more frequent formal religious participation is associated

with having a stronger religious, social identity and that this aspect of identity. In turn, it accounts for associations between more frequent formal religious participation and higher levels of subjective psychological well-being (Greenfield & Marks, 2007). Herberg (1973) states that religion had become the most satisfactory vehicle for locating oneself in society and answers the question, “Who am I.” In search of ethnic identity in immigrant-derived populations, they transformed into religious identity within organized religious institutions of Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism (Herberg, 1973). This theory implies that ethnic identity is replaced by religious identity in subsequent generations. The move from ethnic identity to religious identity is separate among the successive generations, whereas one’s religious affiliation becomes the means of self-identity with the abandonment of ethnic identity.

With the adherence to the Maronite faith, the Lebanese Americans have preserved a communal consciousness and connected social group, which enhances a sense of identity, both group and individual, and as a result, has to establish this sacred reality. The worshipers can construct knowledge of themselves individually and socially through their interpretation of the faith in their ethnic Church. Concepts and objects deemed sacred were part of the spiritual realm, such as rites, objects of reverence, or followers’ behavior. They were unique by religious belief, and everything else was deemed profane and did not hold meaning. Each realm is necessary for the other to survive; the sacred depended on the profane and vice versa for its continuation and relevance. To fully comprehend this population’s identity formation, it is necessary to look at each identity relationship and interaction during this process, including religious, ethnic, and social.

**Religious identity.** Religion is an area that allows the individual to pull together experiences in sacred life, shaping it in their area of consciousness, beliefs, morals, and identity

within the Western society (Pak, 2002). Religion and culture often exist in a close relationship, evident within this selected population (Beyers, 2017). In studying religions, culture, and religious practices, there is evidence of a secure connection between the elements. Religion is highlighted as an essential element in the process of assimilation. Religious identity can determine the rights and freedoms within a social group and, at the same time, can limit them with the same association from other groups. In Lebanon, religious identity is a powerful determinant of oneself, boosting ideological comfort, spiritual collectiveness, and solidarity in times of conflict. These religious institutions provided a place of comfort for the immigrant, preserving past heritage and traditions while encouraging their children to assimilate. In work by Cavalcanti and Schleff (2005) it examines the influence of religion on assimilation, whether it hinders, facilitates, or has little effect on the pace and process by which one becomes assimilated.

The patterns for the effect of religion on assimilation support other studies. In contrast, religion is either a connector to the homeland (remaining in their religion of origin) or a bridge to the culture of the host land (for those who converted). Those who converted to other religions were more likely to speed up their assimilation process in language, civic participation, intermarriage, educational levels. Those who retained their religion of origin were more likely to assimilate at a slower rate than those who converted or who had no religious affiliation in the beginning. (Cavalcanti & Schleff, 2005). As applied to this study, the retention of ethnic religion does not seem to follow in the same manner. In contrast, this group has been able to gain equal entrance into the American structural institutions regardless of religious practices.

**Ethnic identity.** Ethnicity in modern usage refers to “how individuals and groups characterize themselves based on their language, race, place of origin, shared culture, values, and history (Eickelman, 1989). Cultural attributes such as distinctive beliefs, institutions, practices,

religion, and language often form the bases of identity. In some instances, physical characteristics, pigmentation of the skin, or body shape-provide the foundation of ethnic identity. To consolidate such an identity, the members of an ethnic group must also share ideas, behavior patterns, feelings, and meanings.

The issue of negotiating ethnic identity among Lebanese Americans is examined with a study that explores the social ties of adolescent children of immigrants (Ajrouch, 2000). Ajrouch explores an ethnic community and its influence on the development of ethnic identity for its members. Tajfel and Turner (1982) define ethnic identity as a social identity that is part of an individual's self-image. It is resultant of the knowledge of their association with a social group together with the significance this membership has for the individual, the self-identity of culture is never static, and it changes depending on others and other group's interactions. Ajrouch (2000) maintains that it is the second generation that carries or transmits the ethnic identity or loses it. The study of 20 adolescents in Michigan uncovered the hidden importance of an ethnic community for the mechanism of identity formation. There was group consciousness among the participants having traits of White was seen as desirable and had favorable connotations, suggesting that identity negotiated through social relationships outside of their community was a salient element in assimilation. The ethnic identity of not being White is what the second generation wanted to distance themselves from, suggesting a tension felt between the comfort of the community and the social interactions outside of this group membership. White is the desired position, accepting both positive and negative traits that accompany their place in society. "The interaction between ethnic community, American society and immigrant homeland intersect through social relationships to create subtle yet important dimensions to the adaptation and identity of the second-generation cohort" (Ajrouch, 2000, p. 467). Identity development is based

on a universal need to define oneself in one's context. Ethnic identity in America among the Lebanese emerges as a result of "the confrontation of the immigrant culture and the host culture, each resisting the other and striving for domination" (Ajrouch, 2000, p. 468).

In constructing their identity, the Maronites lean towards the facilitation of assimilation within their host nations' culture and the Catholic Church culture. Maronite Lebanese are an ethnoreligious group, whereas they do not define who they are simply by ancestral heritage, but rather through their heritage and religious affiliation. The Maronites define their ethnic identity neither exclusively by ancestral heritage nor only by religious affiliation, but often through a combination of both. In a case study work, Ghosn (2010) examines in a case study the Maronite Australian male and the religious identity construction of the Lebanese identity. This study sought to understand the self-identifying rates the participants referred to themselves with a focus on Lebanese identity. In this study of 33 males, 13 identified themselves solely as Lebanese, constructing their identity solely on Lebanese culture, traditions, and the Maronite faith of the family. Other participants identified as Lebanese blood by Australian nationality, even though many felt they were treated as outsiders. So although they desire to embrace their heritage, they are hesitant since this is not encouraged by the host country. Australian identity was a necessary part of assimilation and cultural homogeneity desired by this country. A third identity construct was the hyphenated identity, Lebanese-Australian, whereas there is a part in their lives reserved for their heritage, but it does not speak of who they are. Four respondents stated they were solely Australian, attributed to the reaction of prejudices and discrimination that many fear due to negative attitudes developed by world events. They deny their heritage all together due to fear or embarrassment. Finally, one respondent stated her identity as being Lebanese Maronite Australian, in which her identity construction included nationality and

religious identity (Ghosn, 2010). Fleeing from their homeland of Lebanon to escape religious discrimination and persecution resulted as a powerful identity marker firmly rooted in their new lives in America. These markers were passed on to future generations.

In a study performed by Khachan (2015), the mixed-method study looked at ethnic identity among immigrant populations of the Lebanese Maronite. This study, located in the Texas Maronite population, focused on ethnic identity preservation among the Maronite Lebanese immigrant population and their children. The study looked at how this population preserved their identity from their country of origin and how they adapted and created a new identity in their new country. The result showed that most of the participants expressed positive feelings towards their ethnic group, although wholly assimilated into American society. The adult sample demonstrated positive feelings and attitudes towards their ethnic background more than the youth participants. Ethnic behavior was found as a significant predictor of ethnic achievement and played a role in the understanding of their identity. This study found that assimilation was not a significant predictor of achievement and played little in developing a better understanding of their ethnic identity. The study sampled clergy of the Maronite rite to determine their perspective on the role of the Church in safeguarding the immigrant's distinct ethnic and religious identities. Clergy confirmed liturgies were similar to those in Lebanon and, as such, played a significant role in the lives of the immigrant in America desiring a connection to Lebanon through religious practices. The study showed how the Church is the place where assimilation begins for this group and is reinforced. This study states that many of the Maronite Churches, established by the immigrants of the late 18th century, have moved away from the country-of-origin language in its liturgy converting to the host country's language. Some of the

newly erected churches are still using the Lebanese vernacular although the congregation is multi-generational.

Beyers (2017) suggests that ethnic identification is formed in part by birth and not by choice. This identity is re-enforced by mythic traditions that emphasize the uniqueness of a particular group or community. His constructivist position is that these elements determine identity as steadily but gradually reconstructed based on an interpretation of the context, emphasizing the circumstantial influences on identity formation. Identity is constantly under revision based on interaction and exposure to other group identities and is flexible.

Understanding the Maronite congregant's identity, circumstances of the ethnic group should be studied to determine which circumstantial elements contribute to identity formation. The Church's role has also become a social role in which it functions as a means of transmitting cultural or secular heritage and conveying not only ecumenical ideology but also cultural awareness and preservation.

**Social identity.** Social identity is summed up in terms of group membership, and meaningful membership within these groups and self-definition shared with other people who also claim that membership (Stets & Burke, 2000). Belonging to the Maronite parishes in America is a shared experience that builds social identity through interaction with others with shared interests and heritage during these experiences. Although the experiences of the Maronite religious service are an event that is relevant to the whole group, it has significance for the individual. In Stets and Burkes' (2000) work on identity theory, the concept of identity includes self-categorization was expanded upon. Self-categorization is when the self is reflexive and can take "itself as an object and categorize, classify or name itself in particular ways with other social categories or classifications." (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 225). Self-categorizing is the

individual accentuating the similarities between self and other members within the group and accentuating the perceived differences between self and out-group membership.

The accentuation of similarities and differences framed around constructs such as attitudes, beliefs and values, affective reactions, behavioral norms, styles of speech, and other properties, is considered to be relevant to the individual and inter-group categorization (Stets & Burke, 2000). Individuals who identify within a group form a strong identity based on this membership and often label themselves based on their labels. Members often are unable to distinguish themselves separate from the group, and there is a uniformity of perception and action among the members outside of the individual role identity. The individual is at the highest level of participation and identification when linked, overlaps, and reinforces at all three levels, so abstraction, the group, the role within the group, and the person (Stets & Burke, 2000).

### **Capacity and Sustainability**

Understanding the needs of its members is essential for continued viability and is key to the future of this religious institution. The expressed needs of the individual are evident in the behaviors which illuminate the willing capacity of these congregants in preserving this institution at a fulfilling and meaningful level. The benefits of the Church and its followers' capacity will allow the successful implementation of preservation or change to assure the success of change to address these needs. A systematic approach identifying capacity levels will aid the institution in meeting its members' needs without impacting the overall vision of the Church. Identifying the levels of capacity will assist in developing a Capability Plan for implementation as needed.

Understanding the influences of assimilation and identity formation provides a picture of the external and internal influencing factors that have created the needs of the current congregation, and these needs can be met by the church when seeking continued relevancy.



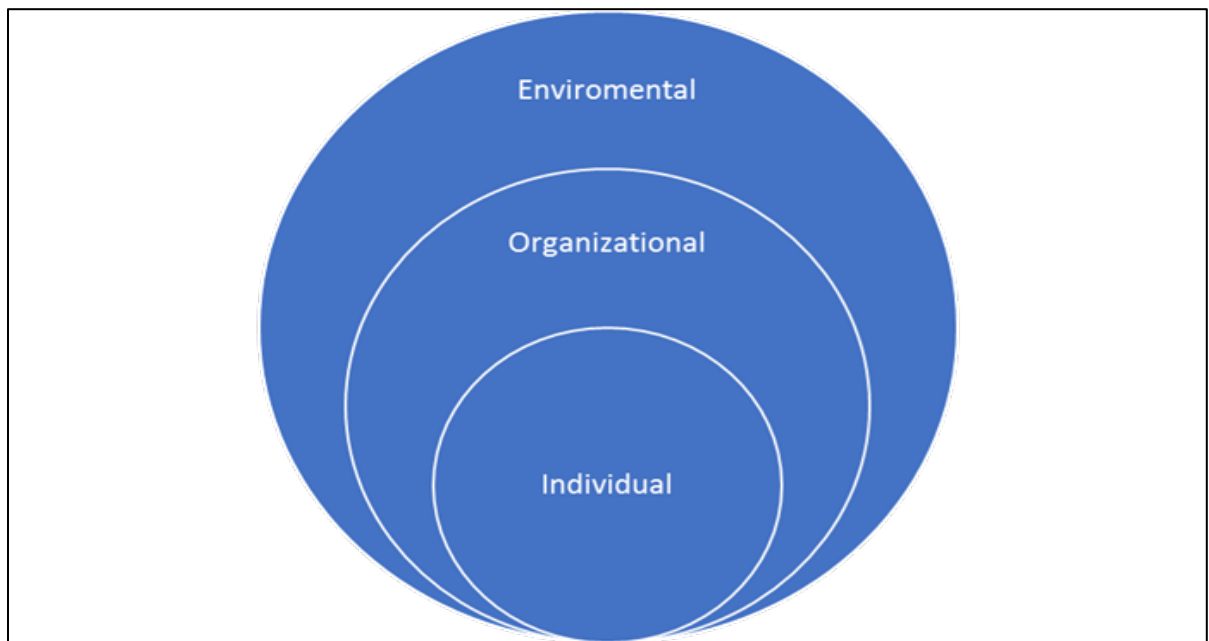
Once these needs are identified, the individual and institutional, the ability increased in the church to work to assure they are secured and conducive to continued loyalty. The capacity building at both levels can contribute to the improvement of the performance of the church. To assure this, the support given to the individual or membership should not take priority over the needs of the church or its vision. For continued relevance or sustainability, there not only needs to be the identification of capacity but the enhancement and improvement of the individual and church.

Capacity is individuals, groups, institutions, and organizations' ability to identify and solve development problems overtime (Morgan, 1998). Capacity building is a process by which individuals, groups, institutions, organizations, and societies enhance their abilities to identify and meet development challenges in a sustainable manner. (Morgan, 1998). There are many models and frameworks designed to implement plans of action for organizations, each focusing on external and internal forces identification and collaboration of members for success.

**Capacity building framework.** To ensure continued growth and thriving, it is necessary to look at issues relevant to both groups involved, the institution and its members, and arrive at a framework that fulfills both parties without encroachment on one or the other (Figure 1). The capacity to maintain relevancy requires reflection on where the community is now and where they wish to be. A plan should be the systematic approach to capacity building, including the Church's definitions of and views on the Maronite rite's issue and goals as a religious institution. The church goal is consistent and unchanging, and the capacity to meet these goals is through continuation. The plan must have the support of the community but must strengthen the Church's capacities.

The objectives of the members (beneficiaries and supporters) are equally relevant in the expectations, interest, and intensity of involvement at the Church is only possible with the continuation of the institution in its true essence. The external context (historical, cultural, and social) of assimilation will impact this Church due to the institution's nature as an ethnic church serving a successive generation population. The internal effect of adaptation and abandonment of sacred and secular identity due to assimilation will also have an equally devastating effect on the membership as the children and grandchildren progress further from their ancestral heritage and no longer see the need to identify with the Lebanese culture.

The endogenous change will require cooperation between the institution and its leaders and the members (stakeholders) to assure that neither conflict with the other's goals (Morgan, 1998). The sustainability survey results showed three pillars of sustainability relevant to the effectiveness of the Church and its population, religious, cultural, and social. Building a framework on these elements will be the most optimum point for the more extraordinary performance of the institution. Examining the members' roles as an internal force within this institution, the patterns of positions, resources, strategies, and values must not remain at the individual or group level but extend to the institutional level to ensure alignment of goals for success.



*Figure 1. Levels of capacity.*

All responses were categorized into these prominent areas of change and are interactive with each other, giving evidence that there cannot be one plan of sustainability due to the complexity of this site's needs. The best approach when using this simple framework is to input a vision of change and follow through with it, addressing the environment, organization, and individual benefits and risk.

***Environmental.*** Using this model for this site is an opportunity to address the multilevel dimensions of action necessary for this site's success. The environmental level includes society, socio-cultural community, and the broader San Antonio community. This framework is adaptable based on its success with another non-profit group seeking sustainability (Matachi, 2006). Stated, the monitoring of the environment allows the Church the chance to identify needs and opportunities for change. The necessity to look at the external or environment construct focuses on assumptions (abandonment of sacred and secular identity), external conditions

(Eastern traditions and practices within the Western society), and risk (loss of relevance) to sustainability. All aspects or levels must be given attention to the plan to be implemented accurately and be viable. The importance of awareness of these factors can have a positive or negative impact on capacity-building efforts. What is essential is that you are aware of those factors which may have positive or negative effects on the capacity building efforts (Matachi, 2006).

Most of the activities falling into this category are treated as assumptions, external conditions, or risks. What is important is the awareness of those factors which may have positive or negative impacts on capacity-building efforts. Capacity at the environment level refers to the environment and conditions necessary for demonstrating ability at the individual and organizational levels. The environment level includes systems and frameworks essential for the formation/ implementation of policies and strategies beyond an individual organization. There are various dimensions on the environment, such as administrative, legal, technological, political, economic, social, and cultural, that impinges on and mediates the effectiveness and sustainability of capacity-building efforts.

Elements at the environment level include formal institutions (laws, policies, decrees, ordinances, and membership rules), informal institutions (customs, cultures, and norms), social capital and social infrastructure, and capacities of individuals and organizations under the environment (Matachi, 2006). The examples of the external context surrounding this ethnic, religious institution include the challenges of a changing population, a movement away from ethnic identity affirmation received from Maronite Church attendance. This Church is ethnic and, as such, relies on the traditions and practices rooted in the Lebanese culture.

**Organizational.** This level is influenced by the environment elements when determining objects to obtain sustainability. The organizational level can include institutions, congregation, and the entire faith-based community. At the organizational level, capacity is determined by how the individual qualities and resources can be utilized to meet the overall institutional objectives. At this level capacity includes the readily available human resources (their ability and desire to implement change within the organization), physical resources (finances and facilities), intellectual resources (leadership, desire for systematic change, management of implemented programs), institutional linkage (community partnership with San Antonio, other Maronite Churches and Catholic institutions) and in placed incentives for change (growth, inclusion, preservation).

Capacity at the organization level determines how individual abilities are utilized and strengthened. Capacity refers to anything that will influence an organization's performance and includes human resources (skills of individuals in the organization) and physical resources (facilities, equipment, materials). Also taken into consideration are intellectual resources (organization strategy, strategic planning, management, business know-how, production technology, program management, process management (e.g., problem-solving skills, decision-making process, communications); inter-institutional linkage (network, partnership), incentive and reward systems. At this organization level, it is optimum for the Church's religious leaders to remain focused on the Maronite rite's needs and priorities as a whole and not limited the vision to this site and its population.

**Individual.** This level is the core of the plan, surrounded by the organization's objectives and the influences of the environment. At the individual level, all people within the church community such as members, staff, laity leaders, and church leaders. Capacity at the individual

level is the essential element of position and is the foundation from which the organization sets realistic objectives. At this level, the congregant's recognition of the need for change is necessary from that point. Adequate abilities and resources to determine if the goals are feasible are given attention and thought. It is the knowledge and skills of the individuals that set the plan in motion. Changing can be successful using their understanding of the Rite, proficiencies developed over the generation in the preservation of the Church and community, attitudes relating to the issues centered on Church and community, interest, vision, and commitment for change for the betterment of the Church. This awareness of the need for change coming from the community's efforts is a clearly stated vision of the community demonstrated in the sustainability survey responses. The participants' suggestions or expressed needs reveal areas of change that add to the sustainability of the Church as it looks towards the future. For example, some changes would include a greater emphasis on the Maronite rite identity, increased religious programs, increased community building, and outreach. Each of these elements requires the contributions and the support of its members guided by its church leaders. Change is not limited to one area or a one-off thing. Instead, it is a frame of mind that is implemented and becomes part of the Church's internal culture of being and sustaining.

### **Chapter Summary**

The conceptual framework provides a guide when examining this population and the various factors that have influenced the level of engagement at this church among the participants. To fully appreciate the present, it is advantageous to look at the past when striving to increase relevancy among the current and future congregation. There is an apparent relationship between the ethnicity of the church and the members. The value is determined by the fact that this group has experienced integration into American society but has retained a strong

ethnic identity. Assimilation has resulted in a beneficial level of acceptance in the culture at the structural level. Retention of their ethnic and religious identity has not interfered with their Americanization process. The fact that they have navigated their assimilation to include preserving their ethnic and religious identity within the normative American society demonstrates the creation of this hybrid culture. Their cultural identity is composed of Americans who identify as Lebanese and Catholics who practice the Maronite faith. Assimilation by most definitions is the adaptive process of integration into a host society and culture, resulting in the abandonment of an individual or group's ethnic identity with the acceptance of the societal norm. This population retention of ethnicity and ethnic-religious practices shows how this retention of ethnicity can be active during and after assimilation is possible and preferable among this group.

## Chapter IV: Methodology

### Research Design

This qualitative study was conducted using the grounded theory methodology. Grounded theory is a methodology that seeks to construct a theory about issues of importance in people's lives (Glaser, 2012). The objective was to gain knowledge from the individuals' experiences in their own words, grounded in the perspective of those who lived it (Merriam & Associates, 2002). The defining characteristics of the grounded theory include,

simultaneous data collection and analysis, construction of analytic codes and categories from data, use of the constant comparative method/analysis that involves making comparisons during all steps of the analysis, developing theory during each step of data collection and analysis, memo-writing to elaborate categories, theoretical sampling aiming toward theory construction. (Bertero, 2012, p. 1)

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the methodology utilized in this qualitative study regarding the assimilated population's attendance patterns and affiliation to the St. George Maronite Catholic Church. This case study utilizes the constructivist grounded theory methodology during data collection and analysis. The study explores the phenomenon using several tools, such as a demographics questionnaire, open-ended question interviews, and a final short sustainability questionnaire. This chapter presents an in-depth discussion of the applicability of the grounded theory and the constructivist approach to this study.

**Site and sample selection.** The site chosen for this study is St. George Maronite Catholic Church. This site was chosen due to its presence in San Antonio for a significant period of time, established by the Lebanese immigrant population nearly a hundred years ago, and its substantial population of a subsequent generation of Lebanese Americans. This Maronite Church served the Southwestern region of the United States for over six decades before the establishment of other Maronite Churches in Texas. It has proven to be a solid fixture within the lives of many



Lebanese over the generations and continues to provide a place of worship for many Lebanese and non-Lebanese wishing to practice the Maronite faith in San Antonio. The community consists of subsequent generation Lebanese Americans, with a small population of Lebanese immigrants and non-Lebanese church members. The committed community has allowed it to retain its relevance in San Antonio and has contributed to its longevity and growth.

**Site.** There are over 84 Maronite Churches in the United States, five of which are located in Texas. The oldest Maronite Church in Texas is located in San Antonio. Lebanese Americans reside in 155 of the 248 counties in Texas, with concentrations found in Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, and Austin (Zogby, 2003). The established Maronite Churches are located in each of these major cities. This study's site is St. George Maronite Catholic Church in San Antonio, Texas. It was established in 1925, initially located west of downtown at the center of the Lebanese neighborhood and was relocated in the 1980s to its current site in Northwest San Antonio. The immigrant population established the church, and many of the current congregants are descendants of the founding families. This church's congregation is cross-generational; however, for this study, the participants who make up the majority of the congregation belong to the third and the fourth generations. All data were gathered on-site and on locations convenient to the participants during the interview process. This site includes the church, as well as a rectory and a community center. St. George Maronite Church's parish priest is Fr. Charles Khachan, MLM.

**Sample.** The sample (participant selection) was drawn from a population of men and women who are active members of the Maronite Church and individuals who are not active within this faith-based community. All 21 participants are third- and fourth-generation Lebanese Americans. The population was selected through purposeful selection based on age (18+), being

of Lebanese descent to the third and the fourth generations, and with one group regularly attending the Maronite Church and a second smaller sample of those who did not attend.

I approached the church leader and received approval to enter the facility with the intent to study the religious institution, as well as its members. Using the recommendations from the parish priest and snowballing to recruit participants. Of the individuals approached, a total of 21 attending Maronites made up the sample of this study. The sample population for non-attending included third- and fourth-generation Lebanese Americans, who neither attended the church nor did not consider themselves to be part of the faith-based community. Six individuals were interviewed and surveyed based on this criterion of non-attendance. This non-attending group offered their reasons for non-attendance, which added richness to the topic of assimilation, identity development, and sustainability.

***Specific sample data.*** A demographic questionnaire was developed and utilized as a means of understanding the participants' attributes and structural assimilation indicators, such as generational level, educational level, primary language, spousal information, ethnic identification, and level of participation in the Maronite Church and its cultural and social events (Figure 2). This demographic questionnaire covered areas that relate to the level of assimilation that was relevant to the study. The responses were helpful in having an understanding of the participant and how the attending and the non-attending are similar or dissimilar. The following charts exhibit the demographic questionnaire responses of all participants, with the first six, represented the non-attending (NPM) and the following 15 cells represent the attending response.

participants	#yrs. Maronite	Attendance	CulturalEvents	Ethnicity	rituals importance	ethnic preservation in rituals	gender	education	spouse ethnic	primary language	# Leb. Grnd	second language	self classification	religious identity
A12(NPM)	whole life	special occasion	1-2xs	very	important	very	FEMALE	post graduate	caucasian	english	3	polish	Leb-Amer	catholic
A7(NPM)	n/A	special occasion	1-2xs	very	important	very	MALE	graduate	n/a	english	3	arabic	Lebanese	maronite
A3(NPM)	n/a	less than 5	3-4 xs	very	important	very	FEMALE	college	n/a	english	3	arabic/span	Lebanese	catholic
A4(NPM)	whole life	special occasion	never	important	important	very	MALE	post graduate	lebanese	english	4	arabic/span	Lebanese	maronite
A15(NPM)	whole life	special occasion	1-2xs	very	moderately	very	FEMALE	post graduate	lebanese	english	2	spanish	Lebanese	catholic
A14(NPM)	n/a	special occasion	never	important	little	very	FEMALE	post graduate	caucasian	english	3	french	CAUCASIAN	catholic
A5	whole life	every Sunday	3-4xs	very	very	very	FEMALE	graduate	n/a	english	3	n/a	Lebanese	maronite
A13	10+	once month	1-2 x's	very	very	very	MALE	graduate	caucasian	english	4	n/a	Am-leb	maronite
A6	whole life	every Sunday	5+x's	very	very	very	FEMALE	graduate	arab	english	2	arabic/span	leb-amer	maronite
A2	whole life	every Sunday	every event	(somewhat) in	very	very	MALE	graduate	caucasian	english	4(+step)	spanish	Lebanese	maronite
A16	10+	every Sunday	5+	very	very	important	MALE	associate	n/a	english	2	arabic	American leban	maronite
A17	10+yrs	once month	1-2 x's yr	very	important	very	FEMALE	post graduate	lebanese	english	2	spanish	Lebanese	maronite
A1	whole life	every Sunday	5+	very	very	very	MALE	post graduate	lebanese	english	4	arabic/span	Amer-leb	maronite
A8	whole life	once month	3-4x's	very	important	very	FEMALE	graduate	lebanese	english	3	n/a	Amer-leb	maronite
A10	whole life	every Sunday	every event	very	very	very	FEMALE	bachelor	lebanese	english	4	arabic	Lebanese	maronite
A11	whole life	every Sunday	every event	very	very	very	MALE	bachelor	n/a	english	2	n/a	Amer-leb	maronite
A18	whole life	once month	5x's	important	important	very	MALE	bachelor	n/a	english	2	n/a	Leb-Amer	maronite
A19	whole life	every Sunday	every event	very	very	important	FEMALE	bachelor	lebanese	english	4	spanish	Amer-leb	maronite
A20	10+yrs	every Sunday	5+events	very important	very	very	FEMALE	some college	n/a	english	4	arabic/span	Amer-leb	maronite
A21	10+yrs	every Sunday	every event	very	very	very	MALE	graduate	hispanic	english	4	spanish	arab american	maronite
A9	whole life	once month	3-4 x's	very important	very	very	MALE	graduate	n/a	english	3	n/a	Amer-leb	maronite

Figure 2. Participant responses to demographic questionnaire.

The participants represented an adequate percentage of males (53%) and females (47%). The sample included both third-generation (50%) and fourth-generation (50%) Lebanese Americans. The attending participant demographic questionnaire responses showed that the entire sample self-classified as “Lebanese” or “American-Lebanese,” and a significant number perceived their ethnicity as very important to their self-identity (80%). Similarly, of the non-attendees, the majority self-classified as “Lebanese” or “American-Lebanese” (83%). This group of non-attendees also viewed their ethnicity as very important to their self-identity.

Nearly half of the participants were over 55 years old and in the third-generation category. The second-largest group consisted of adults ranging in age from 26 to 39 years, with the young adults comprising the majority of those in the fourth generation. The educational level of all participants was higher than the national average, with most of the participants holding a bachelor’s degree or higher for both third and fourth generations. Of those pursuing bachelor’s degrees, all spoke of their intent to continue with a graduate degree upon completion of their undergraduate work, although this was not a questionnaire item.

All participants were asked to self-classify their religious affiliation. The results showed that all participants in the attending category self-classified as either “Maronite” or “Maronite Catholic.” Of the six participants in the non-attending group, two self-classified as “Maronite,” while the other four self-classified as “Catholic.” The follow-up question focused on the rate of attendance among the attending participants; the results ranged from every Sunday to at least once a month. The attendance practices of the non-attending group showed attendance on only special occasions or fewer than five times a year and not for weekly religious services. The majority of both attending and non-attending participants noted the importance of the Maronite Church’s role in preserving the ethnic identity of the Lebanese through its liturgical practices and

traditions. All 21 participants had attended cultural events sponsored by the Maronite Church, ranging from once a year to every event.

### **Constructivist Grounded Theory**

The study's social-psychological nature and the grounded theory with a constructivist approach constituted the most optimum approach design. This case study focuses on the ethnoreligious experience of the attendees of the Maronite rite. This study aims to understand and explore a social process with limited or no adequate prior theory. It is an inductive exploration of the ideas, symbols, and institutional influences as established through the perceptions of selected adults in the community. By examining the constructs of historical, liturgical, and communal experiences, a clear picture emerges, adding to the knowledge of the Eastern-rite Church's enduring presence in American society. Understanding the Maronite experiences from the narratives provides a perspective that sheds invaluable light on this population's propensities as it relates to affiliation to this faith-based site. Their behaviors and the resulting experiences are equally influenced by their group membership, culture, and religious institution. Based on the premise that truth is relative and depends on the individual's perspective, this study allows the participants to create meaning in their experiences. The qualitative nature of the study, the social and cultural context of the topic, familiarity with the religious institution, and the members, require a constructivist approach to arrive at a truthful and insightful outcome, as expressed in the narratives. Emphasis is placed on the phenomenon of successive generation affiliation to an ethnic church and the reflective narratives to obtain an explanation and an interpretive understanding of the phenomenon (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

Familiarity with the Maronite Church and its population allows an optimum position to study this topic. This positionality was noted during the data collection, understanding the co-

construction of the data (Charmaz, 2006). Using this methodology allows an in-depth interpretation of the narratives, probing deeper than the surface in seeking meaning in the data, searching for and questioning tacit meanings of values, beliefs, and ideologies (Charmaz, 2006). Using the constructivist design paradigm shows how and why participants construct meaning and actions in this specific situation of church attendance and engagement in the community experience (Charmaz, 2003). In this case, the interpretation of this experience that is unique to this site and the groups' perceptions lead to a better understanding of the reasons for membership and how these constructs are relevant when focusing on sustainability issues. During the interview process, a keen awareness of differences and similarities grounded in the gathered data emerged into codes. It allowed their categorization, leading to a greater understanding of the phenomena (Charmaz, 2003).

The data obtained have been analyzed and interpreted from a more subjective and reflexive stance than expected from the traditional grounded theory alone. Approaching the topic of influences that promote engagement in an unbiased reflexive manner, suspending any preconceived ideas and prejudices, allows an understanding of the phenomena as presented in the participants' words. Hearing and understanding their words and perceptions, interpreting the interaction between the concepts discussed and reality, and perceiving the effect of these perceptive ideas of the person experiencing it clarifies the reasons for either engagement or disengagement. The participants' social, cultural, and psychological reality is integrated into the assessment in which truth is understood and interpreted accurately. The accurate interpretation of these realities is key to arriving at the truth.

**Role as the researcher.** A notable aspect of qualitative research is that the researcher is the instrument from which the story is told. As part of the research process and situation, the

researcher's position, privileges, perspective, and interactions are understood to have some effect on this study, even with the continual rigor and scrutiny to avoid bias or preconceptions during the data collection and analysis. The Constructivist Grounded Theory methodology allows a more reflexive and subjective influence, which adds to the depth of understanding. As the data collection instrument, I paid constant attention to the influences that might affect the interpretation of the data. Having previous relationships with many of the participants was beneficial in that there was an underlying level of trust and truthfulness, which provided a higher level of comfort between the participants and me.

Keen on my role in gathering data and co-constructing truth with the participants, I made a considerable effort in impartiality, ensuring that the results relayed to the audience were the participants' voices and experiences. As a researcher, I had the responsibility to relay all information in a way that vividly detailed the phenomena so that others may experience them in a similar way. As noted, I am a third-generation Lebanese American with limited exposure to the Maronite Church in San Antonio. This positioning allowed for entry into the site and provided an underlying understanding of the rite and its distinct ecumenical traditions. Because of my limited exposure to this population, there were no pre-formed opinions concerning their personal choices to attend the Maronite Church or preconception of reasons why these individuals remain active in this church at this generational level. I was not raised in the Maronite faith, as such, had not developed notions on its value or placement in my life. The familiarity that exists rested in the fact that the participants and I shared ethnic heritage, and as such, there was an increased level of understanding based purely on this knowledge of shared appreciation of our inherited ancestry.

To avoid partiality or bias, a reflexive journal used during this time recorded each observation, interview, or data collection process. This journal allowed for truthful reflection of

my thoughts and perceptions and enabled bracketing. With a basic understanding of the culture studied, there is a higher likelihood of conveying the meaning of the observations and the collected data to the audience in a better way. This level of familiarity must be transparent through active recording, reflecting, and acknowledging such effects at the time of the interview to avoid bias in the final findings.

### **Research Tools and Instruments**

The methodology used for this study allowed discovering the phenomena through many avenues during the research process (Charmaz, 2003). During the data collection, multiple sources of evidence were brought in that added weight to the findings, making the study more compelling. The tools I utilized were observations, a demographic questionnaire, a sustainability survey, and one-on-one interviews. With the allowance of numerous sources, the data collection offered more robust findings that could be triangulated, with higher confidence in the results. Believing that the general lies in the particulars, every form of data collection was executed with this in mind when creating the image of the adult experience. All data obtained from each of these sources were revisited, reflected on, and analyzed throughout the study.

**Observations.** Observations were conducted throughout the study, including on-site observations of the religious services, community gatherings, and cultural events sponsored by the Maronite Church. Observations occurred at various times to ensure an accurate description of the setting and the population. During the on-site observations, observational and reflexive notes were recorded and reflected throughout the data collection process. Memos of observations and interviews served as reminders of thoughts and feelings, which aided in separating the thoughts that I might unwittingly impose on the findings versus the results that emerged from the data. Understanding the Maronite practices and traditions brought a greater understanding of the



experiences, aiding in the question development. Observations and the observation field notes clarified the perspectives relayed by the interviewees. Attention to detail helped assure an accurate description of the environment and display of the culture from the community perspective. The observation of the setting also covered attendance in community events and religious and cultural celebrations.

**Demographic survey.** Prior to data collection, a Consent form was completed by all participants (Appendix A). Before the interview process, each participant completed a brief demographic questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire allowed a general understanding of the population's generational level, their personal attributes, and the level of their assimilation process. This questionnaire also included questions relating to their ethnic identity and the importance of the Maronite Church in preserving their culture. Demographic questions were recorded and measured on ranges for quantity purposes and to gain a better understanding of the participants (Figure 3). The findings from the responses were categorized and charted to show the attributes and the trends between the participants and their responses. Examining the two groups' responses to the demographic questionnaire demonstrated the similarities, and the difference between the two groups, which was useful during the data analysis stage, was useful during the data analysis stage.

**Interview.** In addition to the other forms of collected data, the interviews gathered personal descriptions of the participants' experiences. Any way that the participants could describe their lived experiences and give meaning to the phenomena would be of value during this step of the process. Capturing a personal and human dimension in the Maronite faith context

***Belief and Belonging: A Case Study of Maronite's in San Antonio, Texas***

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**1. Which best describes your age range ?**

☐ 18-25    ☐ 26-39    ☐ 40-55    ☐ 56 or older

**2. What is your gender?**    ☐ Male    ☐ Female

**3. What is your highest educational level as to date?**

☐ High School diploma    ☐ Some College, no degree    ☐ College, Associate/Bachelors    ☐ Graduate/ Professional

**4. What is your current marital status?**

☐ Married    ☐ Divorced    ☐ Living with another    ☐ Single    ☐ Separated    ☐ Widowed    ☐ Would rather not say

**5. If you are currently married or married in the past, how would you classify your spouse's ethnicity?**

☐ Caucasian    ☐ Arab    ☐ Lebanese    ☐ Hispanic    ☐ Black    ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander    ☐ Other    ☐ N/A

**6. If married or in a committed relationship, what is the religious affiliation of your partner?**

☐ Maronite Catholic    ☐ Roman Catholic    ☐ Eastern Orthodox    ☐ American Protestant (Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, etc)    ☐ Agnostic    ☐ other    ☐ Would rather not say    ☐ Not Applicable

**8. What is your primary language?**

☐ English    ☐ Spanish    ☐ Arabic    ☐ French    ☐ Other

**9. What other languages are spoken in the home or among family members?**

☐ Arabic    ☐ Spanish    ☐ French    ☐ Other    ☐ None

**10. How many of your grandparents are or were of Lebanese decent?**

☐ four    ☐ three    ☐ two    ☐ one

**Which of your parents are or were of Lebanese decent?**

☐ Father    ☐ Mother    ☐ both

**11. What race or ethnicity do you consider yourself?**

☐ Arab    ☐ Lebanese    ☐ Lebanese-American    ☐ American-Lebanese    ☐ White/Anglo    ☐ Other

☐ Would rather not say

**12. How would you classify yourself religiously?**  
☐Catholic ☐Christian ☐Maronite ☐Maronite Catholic ☐Lebanese Catholic ☐Would rather not say

**13. How long have you been a practicing Maronite?**  
☐Less than a year ☐Within the past 10 years ☐Longer than 10 years ☐Whole life ☐Not a practicing Maronite

**14. How often do you attend the Maronite Church for services?**  
☐Every Sunday ☐Once a month ☐6-10 times a year ☐Less than 5 times a year ☐Only on Religious Holy Days of Obligation or distinctive occasions such as baptisms, weddings and funerals ☐Never

**15. How often have you attended Maronite church sponsored cultural events?**  
☐Every event ☐5 times or more in a year ☐3-4 times a year ☐1-2 times a year ☐Have not attended any cultural events .

**16. How important is your race or ethnic group to your sense of who you are? Would you say that it is:**  
☐Very Important ☐Important ☐very little importance ☐Not important ☐Can not choose/Refused

**17. How important are religious traditions and practices to you? Would you say it is:**  
☐Very Important ☐Important ☐Very little importance ☐Not important ☐Cannot choose/Refused

**18. How important is the role of the Maronite Church in helping to preserve ethnic identity among Lebanese in America ?Would you say it is:**  
☐Very Important ☐Important ☐Very little importance ☐Not important ☐Cannot choose/Refused

**19. How important is the use of Syriac liturgical language, music and sacred practices to the Maronite church? Would you say it is:**  
☐Very Important ☐Important ☐Very little importance ☐Not important ☐Cannot choose/Refused

*Figure 3. Demographic questionnaire.*

by interviewing the 21 participants, including both attendees and non-attendees, served as the primary source of the research data.

Once the confidentiality level was explained, and the consent form was signed, the interview process began. I encouraged each participant to speak freely, assuring confidentiality, and anonymity. Each participant contributed to the study in an in-depth interviewing session that

focused on the meaning-making process of attendance, the factors, and the influences that created reality. These data were collected in the individual's home, on the church site, or on a public location. Each interview session averaged 1 to 1.5 hours. Individual interviews were transcribed from the recordings and cross-referenced with the notes taken during the interviews to ensure accuracy. Data collection and analysis were carried out concurrently. The interviews were analyzed in batches of four, allowing analysis time and reflection before additional interviews. With the first set of interviews, a constant comparison was performed to remain cognizant of the direction of the data. Reflexive notetaking was also utilized throughout the data collection to ensure reliability and to avoid any bias that might be present due to my position as a Lebanese American Catholic.

The goal of the study was to have the data collected rigorously and reported in such a way that it would have meaning so that it could show a part of the participants' lives through their interpretations. They were encouraged to give a full description of their expertise from the questions asked, answering in a manner that gave meaning to their experiences. The participants were asked open-ended non-directive questions, allowing them to respond in a way that provided truthful relaying of their experiences as adults and how these were related to various influences under which these occurred. Besides the other forms of collected data, the interviews gathered descriptions of their experiences focused on the meaning-making process, which enabled the participants to share their knowledge in thoughts, feelings, images, sensations, and memories. As allowed by the grounded theory, modification of the questions was considered necessary to address the research question and the goal of the study in a better way. Items were added and then eliminated, following the completion of the first batch and each consecutive set of batches of interviews to obtain more in-depth descriptive data. As some initial themes surfaced during

the first or the subsequent interviews, I added clarifying questions or referred to previous interviews to explore further a topic or a gap that emerged from other interviews that needed further investigation. Some questions were removed based on non-relevance, while others were expanded on, depending on the perceived relation of the altered question to the research questions. Additional questions were determined by the direction of the interview and built on the answer to the previous question at an individual level. Although the questions varied, each remained centered on the concepts relevant to the research question; these questions were not manipulated to give weight to one code over another. The interview concluded with an opportunity for the participant to add anything further that was not addressed in the interview. This time for additional comments was an opportunity to provide completeness in the reflective process of the individual. Previous interviews were not re-conducted using the new clarifying questions or points.

***Interview questions.*** The interview question samples (Figure 4) were derived to begin conversation relating to the motivating factors of attendance and community involvement. Each question focused on the meaning-making process which allowed the participants to share their knowledge in thoughts, feelings and imagery relating to their experience. When there was a need for clarification or additional contribution during the interview process, questions were determined at that time to address the topic(s) or follow-up questions were asked for further clarification or expansion.

Open-ended questions were asked of the participants relating to the topic of Maronite practices among third and fourth generation Lebanese American adult members of St. George Maronite Catholic Church. Questions were answered based on the individual's views and ideas about the Maronite experience. Note that these are just examples and that the questions might

change based on the fact that interviews lead to new leads and the specific questions that emerge with the research process. Interviews tended to be semi-structured; some questions were determined on the spot; others may be skipped. Questions for the non-attending participants were modified to arrive at reasons for non-attendance. Similar to the interviewing process of attending participants, questions were determined on the spot to capture sentiments expressed and the need for expansion. In contrast, others were eliminated due to the appropriateness of the question to the individual's behavior and attitudes as related to the topic.

**Sustainability survey.** In addition to the preliminary demographic questionnaire completed at the beginning of the study, an online post-interview sustainability survey, addressing sustainability topics specific to the studied site, was completed by the participants (Figure 5). The objective of this survey was to gain an understanding of the Church's strengths and weaknesses from the members' perspective. For the Church to remain relevant for the members who rely on its existence, it must be complete to meet the members' multifaceted needs and ensure fulfillment in membership. This survey was the opportunity for the members' voices to be heard, relating to their church-going expectations. The responses submitted by the participants were categorized into areas of significance, as determined by the areas of sustainability identified by the respondents. This survey presented demonstrates the level of questioning and expectation of truthful responses that were categorized in the effort to understand the strengths and weaknesses of this site relating to issues of sustainability.

1. *When did your grandparent/great grandparents arrive in America, and where did they settle?*
2. *Was your family part of the original families that established St. George Maronite church?*  
*How did you get involved with the church?*
3. *What does being Maronite mean to you as a Lebanese American?*
4. *What does being Maronite mean to you as a Catholic?*
5. *What do you think is a unique aspect of being Maronite?*
6. *Does being a practicing Maronite have an influence on your cultural awareness or heighten your connection to your Lebanese heritage, and if so, in what ways?*
7. *Do you find the Eastern ecclesiastical traditions and practices appealing, or do you think that they are not necessary for your experience?*
8. *How does your membership in the Maronite Church affect your daily life?*
9. *What are some of the reasons you choose to attend the Maronite church? Do you feel that this could also be appealing within other Catholic churches?*
10. *Do you attend other cultural events or partake in clubs or groups sponsored by the Maronite Church?*
11. *What are some ways you celebrate or acknowledge your Lebanese heritage in addition to attending the Maronite service?*
12. *If there was one aspect of the Maronite service or community that is most attractive to you?*
13. *Are there any positive memories you would like to share?*

*Figure 4. Interview sample questions.*

## Maronite Church Sustainability

The following short answer questions relate to the topic of sustainability and the Maronite Church.

By sustainability I mean the ability of the church to remain relevant and thrive in a changing environment over time. Like many ethnic churches in America, the role of the church changes as the original population adapts to the host culture, in this case America. To remain sustainable, there are ways in which such organizations can also adapt to the changing environment and population and still remain a valuable part in the lives of those who continue to cherish its purpose. When looking at sustainability characteristics it is necessary to think about it in ideas that will assure that the church has the tools to survive and thrive in the future and continue to serve those who come together identify with the church. \* Required

1. Email address \*

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### Characteristics of Sustainability

Becoming more sustainable in a changing environment may require, new processes, new ways of managing people, new ways of engaging with its individual members and communities and leaders and basically ongoing reinvention. The Maronite church has the spiritual duty to its followers that are definite and unchanging, however how it serves its members is relevant in its ability to continue its spiritual guidance of those members who are far removed in time and space from the ancestral sacred traditions and practices.

The needs of the founding members of the church have changed with the successive generations, and the church also has adapted to meet these needs. Many characteristics of sustainability focus on looking outward and being innovative to ensure relevancy.

While the principles of sustainability are generic, church sustainability presents very specific challenges. As related to the church, what are some characteristics that will prove valuable in meeting the challenges and opportunities presented to it as it looks to the future?

2. What, do you feel, are the 3-5 most important characteristics of a sustainable Maronite Church?

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### Outward looking

Over time the church and its people changed, adapting to the American milieu while still maintaining their distinct identity. As the church looks to the future, the question of sustainability is not only about survival but the ability to thrive. What ways has the church been able to successfully adapt to the changing needs of its faithful while still retaining its distinct sacred identity?

What has the church done that has made it more sustainable and have allowed it to remain true to its original sacred heritage and remain viable in today's society?

3. In what ways would you say the church is more sustainable today than it was 5-10 years ago?

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### Change and Adaption

Like many ethnic churches, the church faces important sustainability questions. Often ethnic churches are unable meet the challenge of change and lose the opportunity to remain relevant. Sustainable organizations keep abreast of environmental, economic and social issues impacting their population, and also are continually assessing what their contribution in these areas. Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs will insure the continued presence of the the Maronite church in San Antonio and America.

What are some areas in which the church has not moved in the direction of sustainability over the past years that will impact its future relevance in this community?

4. In what ways do you feel the church is less sustainable that it was 5-10 years ago?

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**Vision and Contribution**

As 3rd or 4th generation American Lebanese Maronite, you are a unique bridge between the past and the future of the church. As the church and its people look to the future, the question of continued strength is one of great relevance.

How might the church ensure the continued relevance of the Maronite faith for future generations and in what ways have you been a contributing part in its continued success?

5. Please list 3-5 ways you have contributed to the sustainability of the church?


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*Figure 5.* Online sustainability survey questions.

**Memo writing.** Memos are reflective interpretive pieces that build a historical audit trail to document ideas, events, and the thought processes inherent in the research process and the developing thoughts of the analyst. Writing memos is an absolute necessity in that it provides detailed records of the researcher's thoughts, feelings, and intuitive contemplations. The use of memos ensures accountability to the theory that emerges by aiding reflection. I wrote memos regularly throughout this study, as well (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The interviews were recorded electronically, besides notetaking during the open-ended interview and memo writing any noticeable similarities or differences among the other interviews that had previously been held.

The memos were beneficial in tracking the ideas generated during the study, promoting interaction with the data, interpreting the gathered data, and referencing during the analysis of each interview. The memos included several topics, such as thoughts or concerns related to the

study, interpretations of relevant books and papers, reflections on the quality of the process, and thoughts on emerging codes, categories, and the theories. The use of constant comparative analysis ensured that systematic comparisons were made and that this research demonstrated the links between the analysis and the resulting theories (Charmaz, 2003). The noted similarities and differences were addressed during the interview to ensure clarity and transparency. More intensive questions followed, with the intent to gather data on motivation with more depth (Charmaz, 2003).

### **Data Analysis Process**

Glaser and Straus (1967) created a methodology where an explanation of the phenomenon could emerge by methodically coding interviews with terms that succinctly and conceptually summarize each phrase, line, or even word. In the analysis phase, the creation of categories began during open coding. The categories that emerged were further compressed into themes or broader categories. Relations were analyzed both within and across the codes. In analyzing the codes' depth or the quantity of the vignettes assigned to a group of codes, selective codes emerged from the data. Each time a vignette linked directly to a code or a node, these relations were reviewed for clarity. If there were indications of a relation or overlapping in ideas or constructs, the vignette was assigned to multiple codes or nodes of relevance.

The first interview was transcribed and analyzed; a constant comparative process guided the subsequent interviews. Concurrently collecting and analyzing data allow researchers to have a framework and supplement relevant aspects/concepts as the data collection progresses until no further information emerges to generate a theory.

**Qualitative data analysis software.** Due to the amount of data gathered from multiple sources, such as observation, memoing, questionnaire, survey, and lengthy interviews, a database

was used for manageability and accessing of data. The NVivo 12 Plus database was used during the data collection process. The database improved the results and enabled me to organize and track all forms of collected data. This study produced a multitude of data from various sources; using such a tool helped me organize reflective notes, observational notes, key archival documents, photographs, audio files, and transcripts. The transcribed interviews were uploaded into the computer program, NVivo 12 Plus, for further analysis and coding. The software was useful as a repository and for sorting through the data (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010).

**Coding.** Coding the transcriptions or breaking them down into meaningful and manageable chunks of data was a critical part of the data analysis. Codes were created during the entire process, which helped to prevent overemphasizing the importance of any aspect early in the study, as well as to ensure a thorough analysis of the entire interview (Charmaz, 2003). Analyzing, reanalyzing, and comparing new data with existing data (constant comparison) were done at each stage of coding, beginning at the initial stage of open coding until the final stage of theoretical coding.

***Open/line-by-line coding.*** Open coding was the initial step of the analysis, with the development of the codes from the participants' words and ideas gathered during the interviews. At this initial stage, each transcribed interview was coded line by line. All interviews were transcribed, read, and coded manually and electronically during the open coding stage. Coding the transcribed interviews minimized the data into words to describe the data in a manageable way. Initial coding helped me focus on each interview without being overwhelmed with alignment during the initial analysis. Initial coding focusing on individual interviews allowed time for analysis and reflection before moving on to additional interviews and transcripts. As the process progressed, new data were inputted from additional interviews so that connections were

continually being made. After each interview was coded, and no new codes emerged with additional interviews, saturation was determined. A comparative analysis technique was used with each interview, re-coding using the software nodes, and then comparing with the manual coding that was initially completed to ensure accuracy. Once the 21 interviews were properly downloaded and coded, each node was revisited to ensure that proper coding was used. An example of this initial process demonstrates the process that occurred when fracturing the data line by line and assigning codes. During this stage of the process, over 160 initial codes were generated based on the data collected. A sample of the open coding that occurred during the initial analysis process demonstrates the varied codes that were arrived at from the interview process (Figure 6).

***Focused coding.*** During open coding, some codes emerged more than others among the participants' narratives. In analyzing the codes' depth or the quantity of the vignettes assigned to a group of codes, focused codes emerged from the data. Each time a vignette linked directly to a code or a node, the vignette was reviewed for further relations with other codes. If there were relations or overlapping, the vignette would be assigned multiple codes, and relations were identified between the existing codes or themes. During focused coding, it became apparent that not just one construct influenced attendance practices among this population. Instead, it was a complex integration of a series of interwoven constructs to produce fulfillment through attendance. These abstracted themes were collapsed until 32 themes remained that were essential to the experience of Maronite practices and traditions and the factors that contributed to the participants' affiliation

Nodes						Search Project
Name	Files	References	Created On	Created By		
barriers to attendance		0	0	9/4/2018 7:07 PM	RK	
cliques and politics		7	20	10/18/2018 1:16 PM	RK	
proximity		6	15	9/10/2018 7:13 PM	RK	
removed from ideology		4	9	9/10/2018 7:14 PM	RK	
does not attend any church		2	6	9/10/2018 7:14 PM	RK	
feeling disconnected		5	28	9/26/2018 8:27 AM	RK	
no religious attendance		4	7	9/5/2018 11:21 AM	RK	
spouse interference		2	2	9/10/2018 7:15 PM	RK	
non catholic spouse		0	0	9/26/2018 8:31 AM	RK	
non maronite spouse catholic		1	1	9/26/2018 8:31 AM	RK	
belonging		0	0	9/4/2018 5:02 PM	RK	
being part of community		13	31	12/3/2018 8:28 PM	RK	
being with similar people		12	13	9/10/2018 7:51 PM	RK	
expression of ethnic identity		12	19	9/26/2018 1:31 PM	RK	
shared heritage		8	14	9/26/2018 8:32 AM	RK	
shared lineage		7	7	9/26/2018 8:36 AM	RK	
shared religious ideology		6	13	9/26/2018 8:35 AM	RK	
integrating lives		10	15	9/10/2018 7:52 PM	RK	
reliance		5	12	9/10/2018 7:50 PM	RK	
shared experiences		0	17	9/10/2018 7:52 PM	DK	

Figure 6. Open coding sample.

The converged data increased the understanding of the overall case (not various parts of it) and the contributing factors that influenced the case. This form of coding ended when it located a core category. As seen in these sample nodes, I was able to take the numerous fractured codes and transform them into abstract concepts based on the underlying commonality of the codes. Assigning them to broader categories of reoccurring patterns and interconnection created a picture of the major themes that were emerging from the data relating to the motivators that

influenced continued engagement. In this stage of analysis, the multiple codes were compressed into 32 significant categories. Two examples of such categories included proprietorship and solidarity, as shown in Figure 7.

***Theoretical coding.*** The categorical relations developed at this stage were the statements of the concepts and their interrelations, showing how and why a phenomenon occurs. The saturation of thematic categories, with variations within each category, was illuminated by explaining the phenomena through the constructs, the relations among the constructs, and a boundary within which the relations among the constructs occurred. Charmaz (2006) asserts that theoretical sampling begins after categories emerge. At this final phase of analysis, the codes and the categories that emerged during the open and the focused coding were compared to gain a deeper understanding of the group's attendance patterns. The core conceptual theme, to which all other emergent themes were connected, was ethnic identity (Figure 8). The data gathered from the interviews showed a strong correlation between ethnic identity preservation (as the strongest motivator of religious and social behaviors) and all other themes. The phenomenon emerged from these relations of social identity, religious identity, and internal and external adaptation, with the overarching theme of ethnic identity at the core of each conceptual category.

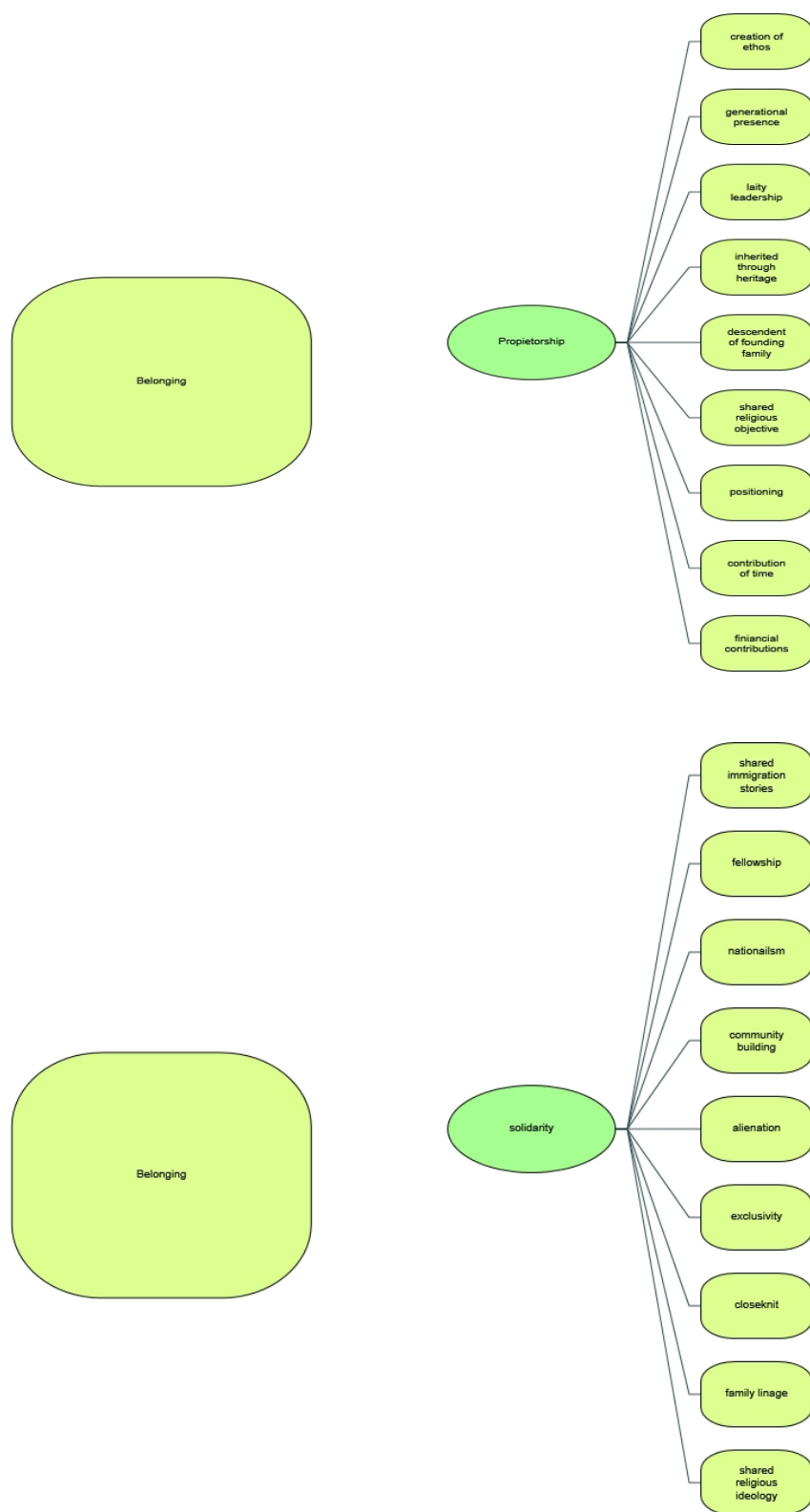


Figure 7. Focused coding samples.



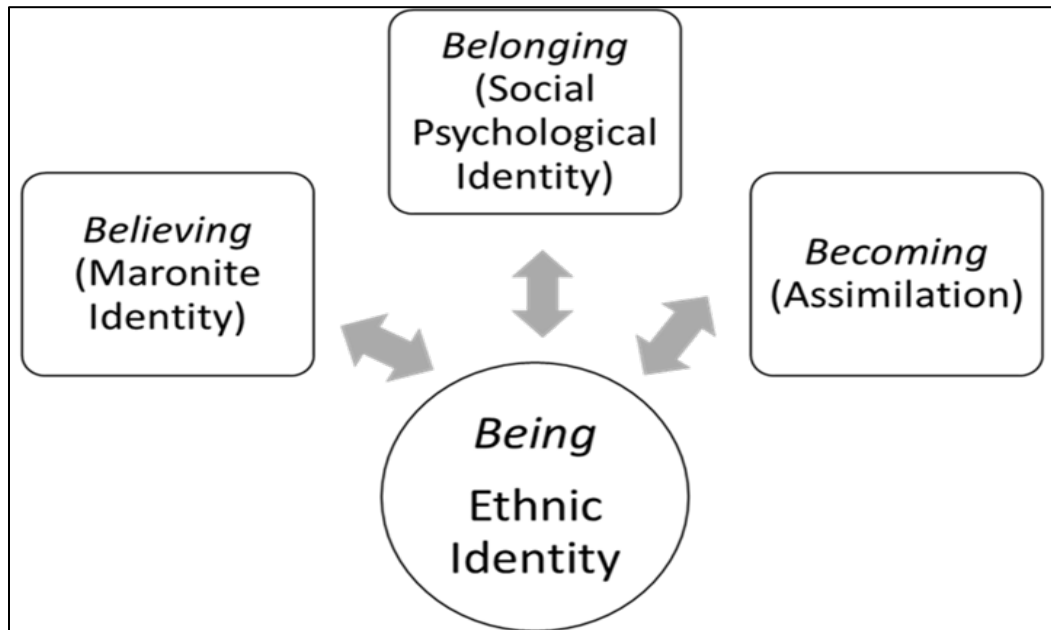


Figure 8. Core themes.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Every step of the process was performed with a continual awareness of expected behaviors and the obligation to the study, as well as to the community involved in the study. During the recruitment of participants, I was honest and upfront with volunteers and always obtained informed consent for participation. The ethical principles used at all times were the universal ones, such as respect the individual and the group, do not harm persons or groups, promote dignity, and always be respectful. Other areas of ethical behavior, which should be taken into consideration when performing research, included the priority to be truthful in analysis and reporting for validity.

The final work reflected an in-depth view of the subjects' behaviors, beliefs, values, and feelings accurately recorded and documented. The data collection included a clear and precise picture of how I gathered, interpreted, and recorded the data, including any areas affected due to my values, beliefs, and experiences.

### **Validity and Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness and the validity of qualitative research would depend on my researcher skills. Knowing and demonstrating saturation ensured that the gathered data were sufficient in providing credibility to the developed theory. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are crucial in establishing trustworthiness, and I was continuously mindful of this fact. The triangulation of the sources validated the data. It supports the principle that the phenomena can be viewed and explored from multiple perspectives and, as a result, is transferrable. As a novice, I integrated a process of member checking. Reflection and maintenance of field notes were used, which ensured consistency of the results and dependability of the data compared with notes made throughout the process. I am confident that the study's data are accurate and correspond to reality. A triangulation of the collected data involved, examining data collection strategies (data collected from individual interviews and preliminary and exit surveys), the selection of subjects (purposive sampling), and observations (site and population).

Throughout the data collection, I conducted frequent debriefing sessions between my committee and me.

### **Chapter Summary**

The goal of this chapter is to outline the research methodology used to answer the research questions. A discussion of the procedure, the study participants, the data collection, and the interview questions outline the specifics of the data collection process. The constructivist Grounded Theory methodology provides an understanding of what motivates attendance among the population on this site. Using several sources, including interviews, surveys, and observations, I was able to interpret and describe the construction of the participants' reality as it

relates to their church-going experience. The results of the analysis indicate that ethnic identity and family origin are significant predictors of attendance in the St. George Maronite Church in San Antonio among successive generations. There is no significant difference in the data based on age, gender, or generational level as it relates to reasons for attendance practices.

Triangulation of the analysis, including sources (documents, literature, and data sets), tools (interview, observation, questionnaire, and online survey), and methods (interview, document review, and survey), establishes validity. Chapter IV presents the study data and demonstrates the utilization of the Constructivist Grounded Theory methodology in sharing the conceptions of the situation, the interactions, the persons affected, and the perceptions of their experiences in this faith-based community through their voices and my interpretation.

## Chapter V: Data Analysis

### Discussion of Data Analysis

During the data analysis process, it became clear that the themes emerging was not linear and distinct but rather interconnected by the prominent salient theme of ethnic identity. Ethnic identity refers to how individuals characterize themselves based on shared culture, values, history, and place of origin. The affirmation of ethnic identity was a prominent influencer in all categories and the underlying conceptual element that motivated behaviors. The saliency of ethnic identity affirmation was a recurring concept that fused all responses in a cohesive and unifying manner of attending Maronites. This ethnic identity prominence is understandable in that this Church is rooted in the Lebanese culture, and its divine presence strongly aligns with the Lebanese ethos. Over half of the participants stated that being part of the Church was such a reliable identity marker. Without the presence of the Maronite Church and its community, they would lack fulfillment as Lebanese American Catholics. The commonality of sacred and secular culture binds the group and bridges religious and social identity satisfactorily and is fulfilling to the congregants.

For this population, to be Lebanese is to be Maronite, and to be Maronite is to be Lebanese. One identity cannot exist without the other. This group has aligned the term “Lebanese” to fit the image they have created and promoted within this religious institutional group, a carryover of the identity their ancestors had arrived with over a century ago. For most of the participants, being Lebanese at this generational level is tied to being Maronite, and the two constructs are interchangeable. This familiar theme of the interrelationship between the Maronite faith and being Lebanese is expressed by Aziz when he reflected on the connection: *“being a Maronite helps you connect to your ancestral past...Cause when we were growing up as we*

*knew it is was the same as being Lebanese”* (Aziz, third-generation). It is the interaction between the sacred and secular culture of the population that cements the behaviors of attendance for this group and solidifies their self-identities. In fact, for most of the individuals interviewed, there was little distinction between the two cultural constructs.

Each emergent theme is discussed in total to establish the relevance and the underlying feelings of how their behavior is reflective of the self-image as Lebanese American, which influence religious and social engagement behaviors. From the data gathered, it is apparent that the Maronite Church has become one of the last authentic expressions of the ancestral heritage that is esteemed and valued among this population. Through attendance, both sacred and secular identity can be activated and galvanized. The identity created by these individuals is socially constructed through their membership and supported by their behavior in attendance patterns.

There is not just one construct that influences attendance practices among this population; instead, it is a complex integration of a series of constructs interwoven together to produce fulfillment through attendance. Taking all the various influences and connecting the construct of ethnic identity was present and influential in all three major themes. The Maronite Church binds the congregant’s religious and social identity in a manner that supports cultural awareness in a satisfying way that allows for continued ethnic identity, frequently abandoned at this generational level. The Maronite Church’s appeal for many third-generation and fourth-generation members lies in its capacity to provide spiritual and cultural identity and empowerment within one’s faith practices. Providing a balance between cultural celebration, social celebration, and religious celebrations for the cross-generation of Lebanese Americans has allowed ethnic identity maintenance and reinforcement. In preserving the Maronite Church in this town, the individuals are actively preserving their history and identity.

The three most prominent themes to emerge from the narratives relating to church attendance were: Belonging, Maronite Church Identity, and Assimilation. The salient theme and patterns of ethnic identity affirmation were evident in all three emergent themes. The emphasis within each theme is upon religious endogamy as a means of preserving cultural stability and historical longevity of the Lebanese people and its faith.

The amalgamation of all three emergent themes creates the story of the Maronite in San Antonio.

1. Belonging: Construction of social identity
2. Believing: Elements of the Maronite Church sacred identity
3. Becoming: Internal and external process of assimilation

### **Belonging: Elements of Social Identity**

The furthestmost prominent theme or category to emerge from the data relating to influences on attendance practice patterns is that of belongingness. In theory, social identity is an essential part of the human experience. All social categories can shape a person's self-concept of being part of a selective group, whether it is at a personal, group, or organizational level. There is a substantive focus on the interplay between formal religious participation and the individual's social identity as members of this faith-based community. The attending Maronite spoke of a sense of belonging and part of a Lebanese community as the most influential force that attracts them to the Church and supports their continued attendance practices. The relevance of cultural solidarity at each level of engagement affects the desires of the individual and the Maronite Church's overall viability in San Antonio. The choice to remain an active Maronite may be the most optimum means of social identity formation and ethnic preservation available to the subsequent Lebanese generations.

**Social identity and cultural solidarity.** Ethnicity is a constant evolving construct at both the individual and group levels. It is the product of actions undertaken by ethnic groups as they shape and reshape their self-identification and cultural awareness. Often religion is oriented towards the maintenance of ethnicity, for many cultures have a unique way of worshiping that is specific to their ethos (Beyers, 2012, Chin, 2019; Faragallah et al., 1997). Ethnic identity supported through church membership is one of the most active underlying elements found within all the generated themes. This group's ethnic identity has been shaped and reshaped based on their membership within this mono-ethnic religious setting. The perceived correlation between Lebanese and Maronite is a driving force in the concept of belonging. This enhancement of social identity as Maronites is centered on the Church's collective cultural identity, whereas being part of this community reaffirms self-identity and cultural consciousness. As such, it allows for the maintenance of the ethnic identity of its members. A common sentiment repeated throughout the Maronite congregant's narratives is that the Church is a robust cultural marker and an ethnic placeholder for this group. Narratives support the concept that without the presence of the Church in this town, these participants would have most likely abandoned their ethnic identity in a manner dictated as the norm among individuals who have fully integrated into the host society. Attending the Maronite Church reinforces the Lebanese heritage that they wish to retain as Americans. The opportunity to engage in specific ethnic behavior is valuable for many of the participants who otherwise are unable to connect to their ethnic heritage in daily life. Aziz, a third-generation older male, summed up most of the attending participants' shared sentiment when he shared, "it is just they go hand in hand ... I

don't know ... I would not know how to be Lebanese without having the Church's part of my community and part of me" (Aziz, third generation).

Different identities become activated as the situation demands. The Maronite Church provides a salience identity that activates an identity that is esteemed and recognized as acceptable by other members. In this case, it is considered beneficial to exhibit and embrace one's ethnicity as part of the religious experience. The activation of an ethnic identity depends on the context of being part of the Maronite community. The individuals can express their identity among fellow Lebanese freely. Participants feel that they can openly indulge in their cultural selves through their religious membership. Many participants noted that the Church was the one place where they could indulge in their Lebanese culture without judgment. The Church allows them to "feel Lebanese," a self-perception that affirms their identity as Lebanese in America. Zara notes that membership within the Church supports her social-ethnic identity: "I think that for me, that Church is basically the only space for expressing who I am" (Zara, third generation). When the attending participants expressed a deep connection to this Church, it extends beyond the fulfillment of religious duties and obligations into the social identity of membership. It encompasses emotional and social satisfaction that is not available or duplicated in other social settings. The data demonstrates how being part of the Church is not only manifested as an external behavior of attendance of religious services, but it also manifests as an internal process of self-affirmation.

Not all the participants rely on the existence of the Church for their ethnic activation. The non-attending has found other avenues to experience their ethnicity within their lives outside of the Church walls. For these individuals, participation in the Maronite Church was not a necessary



element in their ethnic identity affirmation. Dina, a fourth-generation young adult, noted the disconnect between membership and ethnic affirmation:

The forced idea of being a good Lebanese means going [to Church] and spending all your time being involved in the Church, and if your choice is not to be a member of this community, you are not a good Lebanese. I understand my Lebanese-ness through other ways as a result. (Dina, fourth generation)

Another non-attending older adult noted his rejection of the idealization of being Lebanese as tied to church attendance:

They had an idea of what it was to be Lebanese, and they forced their ideas and culture upon everyone who went to the church. I see the church as more of a promotion of a tribal perspective that is said to be Lebanese, but it is not, it simply is a slanted notion. (Raymond, third generation)

For the non-attending participants, the reasons for not attending were unrelated to the reflexive lack of ethnic identification or classification. Individuals within this group of non-attending did not construe church attendance as a cultural experience because they did not perceive its purpose as being for cultural renewal. These individuals did not see the church as a placeholder for their identity formation and maintenance. As a result, they did not place the same overlapping value in being Lebanese and being Maronite. Instead, the resulting feelings of secular culture are not perceived to be the duty of the Maronite Church. As necessary as the Lebanese culture is to its identity, the individuals were keenly aware that the culture and the rite are distinct and not dependent on each other. One exception was Nora, a non-attending young adult, spoke of the value of the Maronite Church in maintaining cultural awareness:

When I did attend, it heightened my connection to my Lebanese heritage. On a day-to-day basis, it is hard to be in touch with your Lebanese heritage or personal identity because you get kind of caught up in a group think, especially like where I grew up. You get caught up in a strong Anglo-centric ideal and way of thinking. You can lose touch, so when you go back to this community, you become reconnected and embrace what makes you unique and individual through this group connection. (Nora, fourth generation)

The acceptance of the Church as a means of ethnic affirmation has become the sole proprietor of this ethnic identity among the congregants, who rely on it for social-cultural fulfillment. The social-cultural identity of the Church is crucial to the self-identity formation of its followers in San Antonio. Omar, a third-generation male participant, noted the strong identity as a Lebanese Catholic:

Traditions make us special; I think it just means I am a Lebanese and a Catholic. To me, it is very synonymous with being Lebanese. So, what does it mean to be a Maronite and a Catholic? It means that I am honoring my ethnicity and my religion while I am a practicing Maronite. (Omar, third generation)

The participants' reflexive classification of being Lebanese and Maronite creates a sense of self that is discernible and promotes the feeling of belonging that distinctive from other social groups. An implicit idea underlying belonging discovered in the narratives is that being Maronite and being Lebanese among this population were the same and interchangeable. Many attending participants related their sense of belonging to their shared interest in the culture rooted in the church community and faith practices. It supports a needed sense of belonging, as Jasmine (fourth generation) notes that "being Maronite evokes feelings of belonging for me, allowing me a place where I feel a sense of community that I am not willing to forgo at this time." The essence of the Maronite faith brought to America by the members' ancestors that hold a pronounced significance with the current congregation. The participants' reflexive classification of being Lebanese and Maronite creates a sense of self that is discernible and promotes the feeling of belonging that distinctive from other social groups. The ritualistic role of the Church, its practices and traditions, solidifies a sense of security and familiarity that has carried down through generations of Lebanese.

One participant shared her reliance on her membership as more than a religious experience. It was the creation of community she was not able to replicate at other Catholic churches she has attended. The social connection was a common sentiment stated by many of the attending participants and speaks of the strong bond the members of this church share:

Whatever city we travel to wherever in the world, I find the daily mass. So yes, I have been to many churches all over ...the same level a feeling of being part of a community was not there.... No. (Miriam, third generation)

A young fourth-generation female spoke on the value placed in the solidarity of the group created from the shared heritage, noting that “it is an understanding when you’re amongst the people who are Maronite that you all are part of the same cloth and community” (Cecilia, fourth generation). The solidarity created from the shared sacred and secular culture among this group has created a binding element that has promoted a strong sense of unity that is recognized and appreciated by each member of the group.

**Social identity and Lebanese heritage.** The demographic questionnaire shows that these participants continue to self-identify as Lebanese, although they are, by most definitions, assimilated into the American culture. This strong allegiance to an ethnic identification among successive generations is unique and beyond the expected norm for individuals who have fully absorbed into American society. This group of attending and non-attending participants have successfully modified their identities as Americans while actively retaining a robust ethnic identification many generations removed from the ancestral country. This maintenance of an ethnic identity categorization has proven to be a strong promoter of attendance patterns within this group. As a result of this reliable identification, the need for maintenance is a driving force that has resulted in the creation of the Maronite Church’s duality in San Antonio. The Maronite Church site is more than a religious institution; it is a grounding element that keeps them socially

connected to their fading ancestral roots. The Maronite Church's unique identity allows the members to connect to their ancestral roots in a cathartic manner through religious behaviors that are satisfactory and meaningful. The different religious beliefs and rituals practiced in this ethnic church binds individuals and provides a social context necessary for the collective transmission of Lebanese values and traditions: "My grandparents, my parents ... they never left the umbilical cord of our Church and Lebanon because that is from where our strength comes" (Selma, third generation). Through their membership, these individuals enthusiastically participate in preserving the ancestral heritage far removed from their lives in both time and space. Some participants spoke of an overwhelming sense of connection to the ancestral land experienced through their attendance practices.

Attendance at this ethnic Church is a means of remaining connected to their inherited heritage; this connection is noted by Cecilia:

All these differences found within our liturgy for me means honoring my ethnicity. It is a tie to my grandparents. My great-grandparents basically established the Church when they still had absorbed a lot of the traditions from their parents who never left Lebanon. (Cecilia, fourth generation)

These successive generations are eager to be associated with the inherited culture that would otherwise be deemed obsolete at this generational level with other groups. For example, an attending participant could see the seamless connection between his Church, his heritage, and his self-identity: "It is my faith ... it is my religion, and beyond that, it is my connection to Lebanon" (Malik, fourth generation).

This continued Lebanese autonomy is an interesting social concept among the third and fourth generation Lebanese American, prolonging an attachment to lands that were left behind by their ancestors. The strong desire to reconnect to their ancestral country, confirmed by the

attending and non-attending nostalgic trips to Lebanon as adults, speaks of the secure connection still felt by the individuals toward their ancestral lands. Nearly half of the participants had traveled to Lebanon with the specific purpose of reconnecting to their ancestral heritage. These trips offered the opportunity for these individuals to connect with their inherited cultural heritage in a meaningful manner, this connection was expressed by Selma:

When we went to Lebanon you know you go visit all of the religious markers, and you know you just you're moved cannot help it be moved it's just you know in the, and when you go to Lebanon, and you go to the Maronite Churches there it is the same the same hymns little different maybe the way we have organized the melodies may be different, but it is the same prayers it's cool it is cool. (Selma, third generation)

For those who have not traveled to Lebanon, there was regret in their tone bracketed with the hope of someday “returning” to Lebanon to see their family’s “villages.” This romanticizing of Lebanon and Lebanese culture could be understood to be a strong motivator in the continued affiliation with the Maronite Church. For many, the Church is the last remaining attainable cultural marker available to them as Americans. The desire to remain connected to Lebanon upheld through religious affiliation at the church, a place that sustains their self-actualization as Lebanese.

Of the six no-attending participants, two had traveled to Lebanon. Unlike the attending participants who felt an immediate connection to the ancestral lands, each spoke of it as a turning point in the other direction. Their trip to the ancestral lands was an awakening of how they no longer identified with Lebanon or its people. Layla shared her feelings of disconnect when she noted that,

when I was in high school, I traveled with my brother to Lebanon to visit because he wanted to go. I found that visiting this country made me see how I was not like others who call themselves Lebanese. I guess I had glorified the “old country” in my mind and wanted it to be true, so I had something that I could call my own in heritage, but it was a

false sense of belonging that only made me feel more orphaned. (Layla, fourth generation)

The acceptance of no longer having the security of being part of an ethnic group was identity altering for this individual. The sense of being orphaned is a common sentiment, whereas both the Lebanese and American cultures are unfulfilling and do not add to the individual's social identity. This sentiment of abandonment felt on the social identity level. This deep sense of not knowing how to identify with a group as a Lebanese American was expressed by the other non-attending participant who had traveled as a young adult to Lebanon. He has also noted how the visit was an awakening to the fact that he was no longer connected to the true identity of the Lebanese culture and had known his Lebanese heritage as it was brought to America by his ancestors nearly a century prior. He loved a culture that was no longer alive, a time and place in which was passed down from his great-grandparents were dead. This realization that what he knows to be Lebanese was antiquated and misaligned with modern Lebanon culture.

**Social identity and proprietorship.** A healthy church membership element expressed by the attending participants was the element of ownership expressed through their current levels of involvement within the Church and community. Membership arises through chance (birth) or choice for these individuals, which creates a strong sense of belonging reinforced through shared ethnicity, family histories, and a lifetime of active involvement. Lilia, a third-generation older adult, noted, “you see all the different types of families that make the Church and whose families started the Church. It is basically a personal invite ... it is the most important thing” (Lilia, third generation). Due to the social significance of membership, there is a high level of personal investment that results in a feeling of proprietorship. Narratives provided were laden with the notion that they had earned the proprietorship they held due to the inherited positions they

continue to nourish. The position held by these members allows them to determine the ethos of the community. This created norm of beliefs and behaviors is upheld and accepted by each member. This selectness is a recognized attitude among many members, as Aziz notes, “we have created this Lebanese American identity or this American Maronite identity” (Aziz, third generation). This attitude of uniformity creates the understanding that being part of this Church is necessitated by acceptance into the community membership. This ownership felt by the members allows for the promotion of uniformity in attitudes and values embedded for many generations. The attending participants felt a deep connection to other members who shared family lineage, generational level, lifelong friendships, ethnic uniformity, and commitment to the continuation of the Church’s presence through involvement.

For these individuals, the resilient social connection founded upon being at one with a particular group with shared histories and seeing things from the group’s perspective. Being part of a close-knit community was one of the strongest motivators in the Maronite community’s longevity in San Antonio. These individuals depend on a collective sense of oneness for meaning making in behavior for the preservation of the Church. Each spoke of their duty to the Church inherited from their fathers and mothers. Their sense of obligation to continue the hard work has allowed the Church to sustain over the years. This level of commitment creates a vested interest in the Church and its preservation. Aziz confirmed this sense of obligation when he noted,

I feel more responsibility to make sure that the Church continues because of what they sacrificed to get it going...I mean, it was a handful of people and no money but just a lot of devotion. And you know feeling for promoting the Maronite rite and all that. So the Church is our Church here in San Antonio. (Aziz, third generation)

Being part of the church community composed of Lebanese people is highly fulfilling and satisfying for these congregants. The membership and roles held within the group hold value

among these individuals and are expressed as having a profound level of fulfillment of being part of something exceptional that they have inherited and given the reins to carry on.

One of the most prominent elements of proprietorship was that a majority of the congregation was related or inherited close relationships over the generations. Chris, a young fourth-generation congregant, spoke of the feeling of family when discussing the closeness felt towards other members of the community, “I would even say that we are family even though we are not specifically cousins, but that came over at the same time... I think of them as family we refer to them as family” (Chris, fourth generation). Nearly two-thirds of all attending participants spoke of the concept of shared histories and familial origin as a strong force in supporting their affiliation to this Church and the close-knit community that has survived for generations. Joseph spoke of the value of familial solidarity in membership over the generations as a binding force that has always existed and never questioned, “I assume that it’s a deep-rooted cultural thing that because my people have been doing that kind of thing for so long. It just feels like the right thing” (Ibrahim, third generation).

One of the significant factors that have led to this high level of accepted ownership is that the current church members are predominantly the descendants of the founding families. The sense of ownership is strong among members who are decedents of the founding families:

Just it is an extended family. It is just part of an extended family. All these differences found within our liturgy for me means honoring my ethnicity; it is definitely a tie to my grandparents, my great-grandparents, they established the Church when they still had absorbed a lot of the traditions from their parents. (Cecilia, fourth generation)

George, a fourth-generation male, reiterated this sentiment:

Ummm, it is the idea of the tradition of my parents and grandparents’ culture that has been around my whole life. It is such a great feeling to set in the pew that I sat as a child with my grandparents my whole life. It has my family name on the end of the row. (George, fourth generation)



As an extension of their religious affiliation, many social groups created have allowed for social interactions outside of the church-going experience. This community is built upon members born into the faith and have grown up within the community's confines. For example, Nora (fourth generation) observed how the Church was an institution that promotes her self-identity and "offers and reinforces a feeling of belonging for the people." The social groupings have created strong bonds over the generations. Nora continues:

From what I have seen, these members have grown up together and have always been part of the Church, and it is all they know. There are many social outlets for them, clubs, parties, and such that bind them. (Nora, fourth generation)

There is an equal amount of time spent with this group outside of church attendance that strengthens interpersonal relationships that further solidify their social identity. Gathered from the stories, the deep connection through outside religious service interactions among fellow congregants provided an additional level of fellowship which cements this group and makes their bonds stronger than might result from mere church attendance. Many of the younger fourth-generation participants focused on the social aspect of church membership. Layla shared her thoughts on the feeling of cohesion based on her perception of likenesses to the others through the shared interest:

Being with people your age and having fun with these people and you can come to see all have some similarities, and it is fun to just be with people that you have something in common with.

She continued with how this secure connection held value to her as a member of a group she identified with,

whether it is your background or your family structure, your value system, and religious beliefs... it does make you feel more connected in the sense of belonging, but overall the picture of being with others like yourself is valuable. (Layla, fourth generation)

**Barriers created from proprietorship.** As a result of the strong sense of ownership created from shared ideologies, family ties, and folklore, the community has built up barriers for others who do not share these defining characteristics. During the interview process, there was a noted amount of proprietorship references that promoted non-inclusive. Members feel that because they are the founding families' descendants, they have always gone being Lebanese entitles them to claim to "their "Church". Undoubtedly, the creation of close social bonds established from this church community is fulfilling for the members and has supported the faith-based institution that relies on such allegiance for continuation. While this has promoted a high level of commitment and determination among this group, the flip side of this attitude is that of exclusivity. Although it is a positive effect having members with such a secure social-psychological attachment to the Church and its community, it can impact the sustainability of the Church because it is off-putting for individuals who are not part of the networking within this religious community. The need to feel and be accepted as part of a group is the natural state for anyone. If there is a sense of alienation based upon uncontrolled prescribed criteria set into place by the few, the negative influence upon engagement is certain. Building upon shared interest and commonality, some fit in because their behaviors are accepted as the norm, and others who do not abide by the conditions of the group do not fit in. Those who do not attend the Church regularly or share the same ideology are not part of the inner group feel alienated socially. The members have created unspoken criteria of acceptable behaviors that are adhered to by the current congregants that promote social unity. This creation of the Maronite face has created a sense of exclusivity for Lebanese American who does not conform to their characteristics.

For the most part, not attending or engaging at the church was not a statement of lack of identification to the sacred rituals or its cultural significance, but rather a rejection of the social

criteria for membership. The counter effect of this close-knit group is that it looks inward to each other within the inclusive group, creating barriers of others who desire to attend the Church. All participants, including non-attending, are born into the faith as decreed by the Catholic Church. The faith passed through the father to the children within this rite. It is a birthright, being of Lebanese heritage with Maronite roots. All Lebanese American descendants of the early immigrants are members of the faith, yet many have abandoned this right due to the positioning behaviors of the church attendees. The non-attending participants feel a definite removal from the religion based on the reception they receive from the community. In avoiding the members' rejection, they have chosen to avoid the Maronite Church as a religious institution.

All six non-attending participants interviewed felt that the church community had the appearance of being off-putting and cliquish due to the underlying element of ownership. This feeling of disconnect creates a definite barrier in their church-going experiences and results in feelings of antipathy. There is the expectation of acceptance due to shared heritage. However, the atmosphere is one of the exclusivities and no acceptance felt by these participants who otherwise should be part of this mono-ethnic Church. There was an explicit acknowledgment of Lebanese heritage among the non-attending, demonstrating that they are not de-Arabizing their identities in other parts of their lives. Nora, a fourth-generation youth, expressed her confusion on the exclusivity of the community:

Like I said, the cliquishness of the other parishioners, I cannot imagine, I mean, as I was a Lebanese American but can feel so disconnected from the community, I cannot imagine what you would feel if you were not even Lebanese American. (Nora, fourth generation)

This noted desire for a community of similar people left the individual with personal disappointment resulted in detachment towards the Church. The Church was established by the Lebanese seeking a place to worship in a manner appropriate to their cultural understanding of

Catholicism. There seems to be the unspoken classification that the Church was established by the Lebanese for the Lebanese. This church mission is to serve its worldwide congregation, with the objective is to serve the Maronite diaspora and their descendants.

This individual, as well as the other non-attending participants with similar ethnic heritage awareness, felt rejection by a community she felt bound to as a Lebanese American. This alienation was a common sentiment shared by all the non-attending, rather than being accepted by a definite community based on shared sacred and secular heritage. These individuals understood their own ethnic identity to be important and that the church was a central location that could be utilized to celebrate their heritage. These participants articulated an overall sense of rejection that made them feel socially estranged from the group of congregants. The non-attending participants perceived that the exclusivity created by the members of the Church was obstructive and deliberate. This lack of fellowship experienced by these non-attending individuals was a primary deterrent in their decision not to attend the Maronite Church in San Antonio: “After a while, our family just gave it up, the people there were not interested in us, and we were not interested in them or being part of that community and its religion” (Elias, fourth generation).

**Social identity and religiousness.** Worship is the act of expressing reverence in the form of religious practices and rituals. The primary role of the Maronite Church is to provide a place of worship and spiritual guidance. Although the church is a religious institution to celebrate the Eucharist, it has the duality of being a secular institution for cultural renewal among many Diasporas seeking ethnic renewal through religious behaviors. The fact that it is Eastern rite, spiritual connection is heightened through unique ceremonial rituals of the Rite. For example,

Lina noted that it was all the unique elements of the service that made the Church going experience more meaningful:

They take all this, you know, traditional ethnic stuff to the next level. I mean, now you have processions, and you have more incense than usual when you got candles all over the place, and it's not your common mass. It's like an amped-up version of you know this Coming Sunday or last Sunday, but it boosts. Yeah, boost spirituality! I think this does it for me. It does for me into helps with my spirituality. (Lina, third generation)

For most participants, the Eastern ritualistic elements of the liturgy create a more meaningful experience.

Although shared worshipping as a means of spirituality was rarely mentioned in the reasons for attendance, few participants expressed a level of spirituality experienced through the Maronite Church liturgical presentation. It is the cultural relevance of the liturgy that promotes a higher level of spirituality, as noted by Ibrahim:

That's why the thing I'm looking at is the Church as a spiritual location. Because the Maronite Church is so different and so intertwined with this Lebanese Middle Eastern culture. Just going to the Church feels good. (Ibrahim, fourth generation)

Many of the narratives demonstrated the marginalization of spiritual renewal in favor of cultural renewal gained through attendance:

The Church is a good means of ... as a means of reconnecting to my heritage and not strictly a spiritual experience ... if you talk truly ... if you talk to people of my generation and they found that the church is what helped keep us together, you know, and the spirituality is individual. However, the community was what was the binding thing. (Zara, third generation).

Al captures the lack of importance of spiritual renewal through attendance:

Maronites are people who have this cultural bound and family ties. I mean, you could go to this church every Sunday and be involved and be an atheist. (Al, fourth generation)

Although extreme in his assessment, it does demonstrate the move away from sacred culture to the secular culture among the next generation. This disconnects between religion and

church attendance suggests that participation and religious ideology are not dependent upon each other. Instead, the Church connection is tied firmly to the social and familial aspects through attendance rather than communal worship's religious benefits. Roz echoes this idea when she speaks of the value of her church-going experience: "It was almost like the church was not a religious place but rather just a place to meet other Lebanese whom we did not know existed"

(Roz, fourth generation). As this participant states,

it helps that you have friends there and that you have social events and that you have or important cultural things. And I do not think it has to be separate from religion and spirituality. I think it enhances it because it is part of the culture. The Maronite Church is part of the Lebanese culture. All right, so, how can you separate the two, or why would you? (Selma, third generation).

This rite's cultural relevancy is the binding force in the church-going experience, marginalizing its spiritual guidance for many of the congregants. Of the interviews given, only three attending participants mention the shared spiritual experience as an essential element that is present in binding this group. Lina expressed this emphasis on the Eastern rituals as meaningful: "I just go for the rituals. They remind me of my childhood, and I find them comforting. My connection to God ... my concept of God and religion fits with the Maronite Church" (Lina, third generation). Participants who mentioned the element of spirituality in their church-going experience were older third-generation Lebanese Americans. Those who mentioned the aspect of spirituality referenced it in a manner that demonstrated the importance of familiarity with the liturgical elements of the Maronite rite or the aesthetics of the liturgy holding great importance. Youssef, a young adult, expressed his positive experience brought about from the comfort level felt with the liturgy:

There are parts of the mass you can't get anywhere else. There is, of course, the overall feel that each of these contributions to make it an experience that I am comfortable with

and feel that I can connect spiritually with. It is something that I do not get at other churches. (Youssef, fourth generation)

The notable lack of spiritual connection among younger fourth-generation congregants begs whether religious cognizance is lost if the reasons for attendance have morphed into a habit or familiarity or social relevance. Although most of the narratives did not explicitly mention the self-affirmation of spirituality during religious services, this does not necessarily mean that it does not exist or is unimportant. The attending participants have made an effort to attend weekly services, which suggests a level of religious fulfillment or at the least religious commitment. This lack of reference to spirituality could be attributed to the fact that spirituality is a personal experience and that it is a given that does not need stating. Alternatively, it could be an occurrence, whereas the church has lost its spiritual purpose and has become more relevant as a cultural placeholder for the assimilated Maronite. Of the entire population of participants interviewed with regular attendance practices, 80% spoke of an ethnic connection felt through attendance to religious services rather than spiritual renewal. Being part of the collective experience as individuals with a common bond of heritage is an equally transcending experience, not clarified as spiritual in the traditional sense.

The transformation into merely a cultural marker rather than a place of spiritual guidance would be an alarming outcome when looking at the sustainable role of this religious institution. However, whereas the data from the interview show that most attendees find the experience to be socially rewarding, results from the sustainability survey show that many feel that the inadequacy of spiritual guidance needs addressing. In the sustainability survey, the respondents spoke of a desire for greater emphasis on the spiritual development of the congregants: “Have more devotionals that are uniquely Maronite” and “active spiritual development, creating

opportunities for parishioners to feed their spirituality through small group classes or retreats.”

Many felt that, over time, “the church has moved away from its true purpose and spirituality.” To offset this lack of spirituality, many suggested increased religious education programs to remedy this lack of spirituality. The survey respondents noted a need to “make more religious education programs for all ages,” and “provide structured continuing adult education classes at convenient times to help inform the parishioners of liturgical seasons”. The desire for theological education suggests that although attendance is rewarding culturally and socially, there is a desire for a deeper spiritual connection amongst many members who feel its absence in their Church-going experience.

**Social identity and situational ethnicity.** The need for the Church to retain its Lebanese nuance is essential to the members of the Church because it is a place where they can fully express who they are as Lebanese Americans. Attendance is a convenient way of experiencing their sacred and secular heritage without interference in their assimilation process. For many of the individuals interviewed, participation is a shared practice in which there is an expected outcome of cultural awareness and bonding with others like themselves, Lebanese Catholics. For many of the participants, it appears that ethnic behavior is a situational phenomenon, in that actively participating in rituals of the liturgy is an affirmation of their ethnic self. There is an altering of behavior that heightens ethnic appropriateness for religious services. These participants appeared much attuned to the setting and appeared to alter their perceptions of the religious situation as having more meaning because of its ethereal connection to their ethnicity.

Many of the participants noted that the Church is the last holding spot of their ethnicity and place where they can express their Lebanese heritage in a way that is fitting to their self-image as Lebanese. Cecilia noted that attendance at the church is multifaceted:



I think they were established out of a need to have a place to express the Lebanese identity, and there is Arabic that is spoken at these gatherings you know everybody can feel comfortable with their ethnic identity when you are going to these Maronite events. (Cecilia, fourth generation)

It is a place to be comfortable in their ethnic behavior that is unappreciated in social gatherings outside of the community. The expected behavior and outcome of attendance have high cultural relevance for this diaspora group. "I think that for me, that Church is the only space for expressing who I am. I don't have any Lebanese friends. There aren't a lot of Lebanese that you meet" (Ibrahim, fourth generation). Amir concurred when he spoke of how the church supports his identity:

Culturally speaking. I would say my family here in San Antonio as far more ethnically behaving is a lot more ethnic in terms of just our lives. You know, like it, but it's all through the Church. So I feel like you remove the Church from that for the people like me all of a sudden. I am not Lebanese anymore. (Amir, fourth generation)

Being at the church evokes feelings of cultural renewal that is not accessible to these individuals outside of the church walls: "What ties Lebanese American to the Lebanese culture is through the Church. You know, like I said, if it were not for the Maronite Church, I would not feel Lebanese" (Ameen, fourth generation).

Preserving the culture may not be the duty of the Maronite Church; however, the importance of the Lebanese culture and traditions is a vital presence of unity in America among the successive generations. It is one of the last strongholds of the Lebanese culture available to many of the congregants. When they share their culture with others in the community, they behave in a way that is expected or understood. During the interviewing process, as the interview progressed, the participants opened up more and allowed their ethnic selves to surface. They used common words that were Arabic and mingled within their dialogue because they felt comfortable with me as a fellow Lebanese. Arabic tête-à-tête detected during the observation of

the church service and community events among members was limited to a few words and awkwardly injected into the conversation. This community is a mostly third and fourth generation Lebanese American, but during gatherings, they insert Arabic words and accentuate the pronunciation of Arabic food and music. This nostalgic use of Arabic demonstrated that they might hide this part of themselves when they are not on the church grounds. This indulgence of their ethnic self, or what they perceive to be ethnic, is situational and triggered by attendance and is useful when with fellow Lebanese and Maronites.

**Situational ethnicity and non-attending Lebanese American.** For non-attending participants interviewed, the necessity for cultural renewal is not dependent on the setting (Maronite Church) or situation (attendance). The attending relies on the cultural elements of the Church as a statement of their Lebanese heritage; however, for the non-attending Lebanese American, the choice not to participate in the Maronite community is not a statement of abandonment Lebanese identity. These individuals do not rely on the Maronite identity as being a means of ethnic identity. These participants negotiate ethnic boundaries, separating ethnic group membership from biological ethnicity. The individual's self-concept is not created from a situational involvement but appears to be more internal processes. This idea of separation from group identity and embracing an individual identity was common among the participants who choose not to be part of the Maronite Church. This was evident because these individuals participate voluntarily in cultural events at the same level as those who are active in the Maronite Church. Of the 21 participants interviewed for this study, all showed a continued ethnic identification of being Lebanese often experienced through cultural events offered through the Church. Although the individual may not see the need for church attendance for cultural renewal

on a sacred level, it is still relevant on a secular level. Youssef noted that there as a Lebanese he feels like an outsider at the religious site,

That you do not need to feel like you have to be a certain ethnicity to belong to the Church. I feel if it were more open, I would go because that puts less pressure on me. I mean when I go I feel that I don't look like them, I am blonde and blue eyes, I don't talk like them, a lot of people are shouting at each other in Arabic, I don't feel a connection to this eastern Church. If I feel this way, being Lebanese, I can't imagine what someone else would feel if they wanted to go to this Church and were not Lebanese. (Youssef, fourth generation)

None of the non-attending participants felt that attendance was a necessary means of connecting to their heritage, as noted in their response. For many non-attending individuals, participating in this Eastern Rite does not make them feel Lebanese. Instead, their self-identity is more individualized and personal and not expressed through group worship. These individuals stated that they do not think that by attending the Church, they are somehow more Lebanese than if they do not. The situation in which they express their ethnic self is outside of this community and more personal and individual. This group likely has a greater desire to conceal their ethnic self more frequently due to the disconnect they feel towards group identity. Roz, a young adult, noted that she does not need a situation to confirm her identity as a Lebanese: "I don't do anything that reminds me that I am Lebanese. I feel that being Lebanese is just who I am, and I do not need to reinforce it with daily activities that seem forced to me" (Roz, fourth-generation). This sentiment was common among the non-attending, in that they preferred to see their Lebanese heritage as an individual quality acknowledged outside of group membership. For these non-attending participants, participating in this Eastern Rite does not make them feel uniquely Lebanese. Instead, their self-identity is more individualized and personal and not expressed through group worship. These individuals stated that they do not think that by attending the Church, they are somehow more Lebanese than if they do not. The situation in

which they express their ethnic self is outside of this community and more personal and individual. This group likely has a greater desire to conceal their ethnic self more frequently due to the disconnect they feel towards group identity.

How individuals express their ethnicity is optional, it could be through association or in a specific situation, or it could focus on ancestry. In the non-attending Maronite group, the individuals identified as Lebanese or Lebanese Americans did not feel the need to be part of the Maronite community to experience their ethnic self. One participant shares her disconnect from the community stemming from the fact that she feels that she does not share in the same values or have anything in common with the members of the Church whom she sees as having slowed assimilation. She feels more Americanized and does not desire to cling to her ethnic heritage through an affiliation with the Church. This individual was the sole participant among the non-attending group that identifies as Caucasian.

Let us say that I do not relate to the people in the community anymore. Since I feel like I am generations removed and do not have as much in common with them as someone that I might pre-select to be friends with. For those who do attend, I guess ... when our ancestors immigrated here, they kind of started off being very similar they were cousins with the exact same life circumstances and with each generation some people kind of diverge and become different and more different than those who stayed at the Church. So yeah, I do not find it enjoyable to be with the church people because we are so different on so many levels. (Layla, fourth generation)

For non-attending, there was an acceptance of shared traits in acknowledging their heritage; all non-attending participants in this category participated in cultural events sponsored by the Church. This limited exposure to the Church fit their needs for cultural experience and renewal and allowed them to participate without having to emerge in the culture on a more regular basis fully. For these individuals, small doses of their cultural nuances are sufficient in maintaining their ethnic individuality.

### **Believing: Elements of the Maronite Identity**

The Maronites are Uniate Catholics. As a Uniate rite, it recognizes the Holy See authority's authority and follows Catholic theological teachings. As an Eastern rite, they have their own form of worship specific to the people they serve. Many Lebanese continue the practice of their Maronite faith resulting in a worldwide congregation. What is appealing to the faithful living in different countries is that the rite is a connection to Lebanon, and its ecumenical presentation unifies all Maronites worshipers worldwide. Attendance practices help determine a sense of their self-identity and sustain this identity through its ceremonial sacred practices. The religious experiences and spirituality are personal and individual, each bringing their sensitivities and perceptions. At the same time, the uniqueness of this distinct Rite is shared collectively through peripheral behavior.

The Maronite liturgical traditions and practices have been in place since the 4th century and have resolutely preserved its sacred integrity since its inception. The Eastern religious traditions and practices are necessary to the participants seeking spiritual and cultural renewal in their church-going experience. The expression of their ancestral worship traditions and practices leads to a more salient identity as Lebanese Americans. This distinctive form of worship offers salience to the participant's identity, and through this religious, social context, activates ethnic identity embedded in their self-identification. Selma noted the reliance on the ethnic identity and its connection to her heritage: "I think that the unique part of being Maronite is how closely tied to my ethnicity. I mean, there is no question on the direct relationship between being Lebanese and being a Maronite" (Selma, third generation). This sentiment was prominent throughout each of the attending interviews. Because of the connection to ancestral lands in its practices and

traditions, the delineation between ethnic and religious identity is nonexistent. Instead, it is incorporated in a manner so that one cannot exist without the other.

This feeling of religious solidarity, shaped from the shared cultural heritage, aligns the congregants' sacred and secular culture in a meaning-making manner. The maintenance of the ethnic identity of the Maronite is dependent on the ethnic identity of the Church. The Maronite Church community provides a place where many individuals can experience being a part of a selective social environment that promotes their self-concept of who they are as Lebanese American Catholics. Attendance allows for ethnic self-preservation and supports their desire to express this internal affirmation externally. The preliminary demographic questionnaire results showed that both attending and non-attending participants surveyed responded similarly in that the use of Syriac liturgical language, music, and sacred observations is important (10%) to very important (90%) to the Maronite Church identity. The follow-up question was the importance of the continuation of the distinctive liturgical essence as a means of preserving the culture. All 21 respondents responded that the role of the Maronite Church and its Eastern divine essence in serving to preserve ethnic identity among Lebanese American was important to very important. These undivided responses demonstrate the importance of the successive generations of Lebanese American places on the role of the Church in America as a distinctive element that is unique to the Lebanese culture, whether they attend or not attend religious services. The responses suggest that the Church is a sacred gatekeeper of distinctive religious presentations that should not merge into the American Catholic Church. Its sacred value remains pertinent in its role as cultural preservation. All participants felt the Church's role, practices, and rituals, solidified into a sense of feeling secure and a potent characteristic in their ethnic identity. It is precisely the use of unique rituals and practices that ensured social bonding and commonality.

Elements of religious services such as prayers, music, art, vestments, and architecture draw the attending participants into the Rite's cultural uniqueness, adding to the complete experience.

When looking across the data, intense feelings of connection, each member felt to the Church, emerged as it related to the Rite and faithful's cultural similarities.

**Maronite identity and liturgical vernacular.** The sustainability of the worldwide church is dependent on the maintenance of the spiritual liturgical heritage. The most evocative liturgical element of distinctiveness is the continued presence of Aramaic in the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist. The most prominent element is the use of Aramaic within the liturgy. Nora observed that

the Church has defined role in the lives of these people, and it is because of the archaic practices and traditions that it remains appealing to the Lebanese . . . for the services are in Arabic, Aramaic...Syriac language. (Nora, fourth generation)

She continued to speculate that it is the vernacular tied to the Middle East that binds the congregants on a deeper level: it "has the same effect in that it helps in combining your spirituality and culture is like a unique way" (Nora, fourth generation). The use of this archaic language during the service has a significant impact on the churchgoer experience. The attending participants frequently mention the vernacular as the essential sacred element within the Maronite Church, deepening their ethnic awareness as Eastern Catholics.

There were numerous references made by the participants of the deep ethnic connection felt due to the use of the archaic liturgical vernacular. The congregants can subjectively experience liturgical practices without knowing the Aramaic or Arabic language. Of the participants interviewed, only a small percentage (20%) spoke Arabic. Nevertheless, all appreciated the use of Arabic and Aramaic in the liturgy and understood how the use of this archaic language positively impacts their overall Church-going experience. The experience of

hearing the familiar chants and vernacular is a strong attraction for all the participants. Ameen relates this familiarity to the vernacular as being the element that has the most significant appeal:

The singing and chants in Arabic or Syriac.... there is nothing like the familiarity and comfort of coming back to where you feel you belong, and some days, the Church is the only thing that makes me feel Lebanese at all. It is the only Lebanese experience I may have in a week or a month. (Ameen, fourth generation)

Lina, a third-generation older adult, also noted the appeal of this Eastern liturgy as it relates to her heritage:

The music the prayer the incense the people it all comes together to have this experience that you value exactly it's just they go hand in hand I don't know I wouldn't know how to be Lebanese without having the church's part of my community and part of me. (Lina, third generation)

Cecilia reinforced this same level of connection felt through the archaic liturgical presentation:

The Maronite service is different in what way a portion of the mass is in Aramaic or Arabic, and Aramaic is supposed to be the language that the last supper was set in so they pray over that you can rest and the blood in Aramaic so it's totally reenacting the actual Last Supper which is unique and there are other portions of the mass in Arabic. (Cecilia, fourth generation)

It is the combination of the ritualistic essence of this Rite and the meaning given to these rituals that are meaningful to the Lebanese American. For example, Anthony describes how going to the Church allows for a higher level of meaning:

It's all of it. There are parts of the mass you can't get anywhere else. There is, of course, the overall feel that each of these contributes to that make it an experience that I am comfortable with and feel that I am able to connect spiritually with that I do not get at other churches. (Anthony, fourth generation)

The fact that it holds such relevance among this population and is not available in other religious institutions gives more weight to the experiences:

There are parts of the mass you can't get anywhere else. There is, of course, the overall feel that each of these contributes to that make it an experience that I am comfortable with and feel that I am able to connect spiritually with that I don't get at other churches. (Aziz, third generation)



In addition to the liturgical vernacular, a significant number of participants referred to the subdued liturgical music and distinct prayers innate to the divine essence of attendance. Aziz noted that it was the connection between the people and the culture that was appealing to the congregants:

Your connection to the music and language of the Maronite Church that you do not have with the Roman Catholic Church, it is a deeper connection than you are even able to put words to. (Aziz, third generation)

Cecilia shared similar to this sentiment of connection to the distinctiveness of the liturgy versus the Latin rite:

I think what is unique about the Maronite Church is the cultural identity that underlies it, but again you do make a choice to attend Maronite Services versus Roman Catholic because of its exposure to Arabic and to Arabic speaking people. (Cecilia, fourth generation)

Observations at the site support the narrative's reflective responses on the distinctness of the liturgical elements. Noted differences in music to iconography were noticeably foreign from the modern Post Vatican II music found within many Latin rite Churches. Being rooted in the Eastern culture, the Rite is noticeably more austere and muted, almost possessing an essence of solemn chanting that is distinct to the Eastern world. The prayers were equally solemn and subdued, resembling chanting rather than joyous, uplifting prayers often found in the Latin rite. These referenced ritualistic elements of the liturgy heightened religious experiences. For example, Ameen noted that

when I'm around the people, I feel more of that come out of me [Lebanese awareness], even the prayers, they are different. Like our prayers are very, very specific kind of thing ... it's what you love when you're at the Maronite Church. (Ameen, fourth generation).

The pairing of the Syriac chanting, somber music, monotone responsorial prayers, and abundant use of incense creates an atmosphere that speaks of another time and place, offering a moment of

transformation that is evocative. This otherworldly experience claimed to evoke a higher reverence by many of the participants.

Of the non-attending population, the distinct liturgical traditions and practices were not a specific barrier or deterrent. The fact that the Eastern ritualistic elements of the liturgy were not off-putting suggests that the Church's disconnect is not a result of being de-Arabized or having abandoned their ethnic identity or overtly denying their ethnic heritage. Data from the demographic questionnaire suggest that there is an appreciation of the Eastern liturgical elements. All non-attending responded that the use of Syriac liturgical language, music, and sacred observations was critical in the Maronite liturgy and should be preserved. Although all non-attending responded that the importance of the distinctive practices and traditions in maintaining the Maronite identity, it was not important enough for them to be part of it. This appreciation of the culturally relevant liturgy suggests that the lack of belonging was such a strong negative feeling that it could shadow the unique liturgical essence's attractiveness.

**Maronite identity and cultural elements.** The current status of liturgical practices and traditions at this church are true to the Maronite rite practices and traditions worldwide. The only variation that is apparent is in the liturgical vernacular, whereas the mass is currently both English and Aramaic to accommodate the American Maronite. Based on the narratives, there appears to be a conscious and deliberate avoidance to change among the participants related to the liturgical practices and traditions that were established nearly a century ago and are now in place. The members of this Church do not wish for movement towards Americanization, for this adaption would be an affront to the church identity in their minds. For example, Ameen viewed adaption as abandonment: "I don't think it's necessary to abandon the ethnic heritage. I feel it can stay how it is and maintain itself. It just cannot be a Maronite Church without the Lebanese

culture” (Ameen, fourth-generation). The Rite’s appreciation is placed in the Rite’s history and its connection to their ancestral lands, which they are not willing to erase as Americans. When pushed to think about change within the liturgical presentation, all members responded that moving in the direction of more English would destroy the integrity of the Rite, and the distinctiveness that separates it from the Latin Rite and moving towards more Arabic would alienate the current members. Yasmine, a fourth-generation young adult, felt that the move towards ethnic awareness was generational:

I feel the balance between Lebanese and American in the mass is a true representation of the population of the church and the new direction of moving towards being more ethnic is detrimental to the successive generations who are not *able to easily relate to the Arabic vernacular and ethos*. (Yasmine, fourth generation)

Although the church’s congregation consists primarily of the founding families’ descendants, there is a minority of congregates that are newly arrived Maronite’s from Lebanon. There is the expressed acceptance of the new members, yet, at the same time, it opened dialogue questioning the direction of the Church with the influence of the newly arrived. Many of the participants viewed the influx of immigrants as a welcomed influence in that it would assure that the Church remain true to its Eastern roots and not adapt to the American culture as other churches have done. A significant number of participants compared the direction of the Austin Maronite Church (established in the 1980s) as unauthentic and uncharacteristically American. Aziz considered the possibility of change to that of the Austin church:

I don’t think the Church here in San Antonio is going to go the same route as the Austin church which is moving more towards blending into the American culture, but instead I imagine it is moving more to try to adapt to the new immigrant population and being more culturally relevant and appropriate...as long as we have people coming in I think the cultural component will stay strong and at least for the next couple of generations. (Aziz, third generation)

**Maronite identity and Catholic appreciative.** Being Maronite for many rests on the notion of being the “other,” especially within the Catholic Church. Within the normative Latin rite, the fact that these individuals are Lebanese they are termed ethnic Catholics, which creates a perception of being an outsider. The Maronite rite is in union with the Universal Catholic Church. It has the authority to present its distinct theological teachings and liturgical presentation to meet the needs of those which it serves. As a result, the rite has retained its distinct liturgical vernacular, prayers, music, and visual art that distinguishes it from Latinized rites. Being a relatively smaller Catholic group within such an extensive system, where it is a little-known sector of the Catholic faith, leaves many Maronites feeling alienated, not connected or united with the Roman Catholic Church. Religion comes from the Latin word, which means “to tie or bind together” (Merriam Webster). This unification is accentuated when the shared ideology aligns with the congregants’ cultural heritage. Ethnic religions are distinctive in their relationship with an ethnic group and often shape their solidarity with an ethnic identity. In this case, it is easy to understand how a different, shared religious belief can be a strong force that unites and binds people and becomes a central part of one’s identity through affiliation. In America, the Maronite rite is embedded in an ancestral cultural context that shapes the experience distinct from the American Catholic experience among Lebanese Americans. This culturally based Rite adds to the participant’s overall experience living within American society, providing a place of renewal on many levels. It is a secure connection to the Eastern world that distinguishes this Church from the Latin rite and unites the members and promotes religious self. The concept of religious identity as Maronite is evocative in contrast to the Latin rite of the Catholic Church. The frequent comparison between the Maronite Church and the Roman Catholic Church demonstrates the conscious demarcation between the two Rites. The deliberate categorization

between the two rites holds significant individual importance to the participants as if to distinguish their religious practices as far more meaningful to them than the other Rites within the Universal Church as an expression of self.

As Catholics, each of these participants has attended Latin rite mass, each finding this experience unfulfilling. Aziz, an older well-spoken participant, spoke of his commitment to the church through actual attendance as being true to his image of religious behavior. He noted his personal preference in the Maronite religious presentation as it relates to his spirituality:

You know the prayers and other ... that are part of the Church [Latin rite], I do not...I can't connect with it because it is not how I was raised. I do not know...it's the best way I can describe it, it is truly hard to put into words, but that is the best way to describe why I do not attend other Catholic churches...it just does not offer me anything that I need from my Church-going experience...you know spirituality and community... I am not looking for a feeling. Do not get me wrong, but by the same token, I am not looking for bad songs bad show tunes you know[laughs]. (Aziz, third generation)

The unique ecumenical features heighten the experience for many of the attending participants. The experience of the culturally relevant presentation of their faith creates a level of spirituality that is not attainable at other churches. Omar articulated that if these elements are not present, a higher level of spirituality is absent: "I won't go to the Roman Catholic Church. I do not get the same spiritual connection from going from the prayers. They just do not get it, so I don't go" (Omar, third generation). Attending the Maronite service provides a richer experience for them because it ties to their heritage as Lebanese Catholics:

That is not a watered-down version of Catholicism. It's just different; it is a little different. It has its roots in Lebanon, but how connected it is, you know, I don't know it's kind of just all goes in a circle. However, it's always the Maronite Church a fabrication of Lebanese American or is it true I would say limiting and whatever it is true to what the religion has not been watered down, and that's why there is this the dubious connection between is the Church here for cultural reinforcement, or is it here for spiritual guidance or is it able to do both. I think separating the two is a very American thing. (Lina, third generation)

Attendance is a means of defining who they are through their religious practices and acts, and a method of celebrating their ancestral heritage as a unified group in a formal manner not readily available to them at other Catholic institutions.

It is more than merely being a Catholic; it is a Lebanese Catholic that has created a secure connection to the Church for most participants. Being Maronite is the completion of being a Lebanese American for this individual. Subsequently, the members can receive more meaning from their Church going experiences as Catholics due to the uniquely relevant cultural nuances. These individuals understand their place within the Universal Church. Nevertheless, there is a distinction made by the congregant that separates them from the normative American Catholics and Catholic churches (Latin Rite), “as opposed to just something else that exists as part of American society. If you don’t have the cultural companion, it would just be another catholic institution” (Omar, third generation). The narratives gathered suggest that attendance at the Maronite Church is a means of celebrating their Catholic faith in a manner which most found to be more meaningful because of the heightened cultural connection. Aziz spoke of the multilevel meaningfulness Maronite attendance: “I do not attend other Catholic churches ... it just does not offer me anything that I need from my church-going experience ... you know spirituality and community” (Aziz, third generation). This emotional delineation between the rites was apparent in many of the narratives presented by the older participants:

I am probably not a would not be considered very good. Catholic because if I do not go to the Maronite Church for whatever reason .... I will not go to the Roman Catholic Church. I do not get the same spiritual connection from going, from the prayers ... they just do not get it, so I do not go. (Selma, third generation)

The impact of attendance reaches beyond the mere fact that they fulfill their need to attend religious services; it is self-affirmation presented through their Maronite attendance. Ameen

contributed similar sentiments of self-affirmation during his explanation of his attendance practices:

I do not feel like it's an obligation [attendance]. I feel like it's an intrinsic part of me. So it's kind of like my virtue of being Maronite. For me to fully be myself, I have to acknowledge it, and if I ignore it, somehow not be totally realizing who I am. (Ameen, fourth generation)

The narratives suggest that if it were not for this connection between the sacred and secular self that it would be less meaningful for the assimilated congregant. These individuals self-identify as Maronite. This sense of religious commonality provokes a communal consciousness that enhances a sense of group identity and establishes the group itself worthy and of great importance. Both Aziz and Cecilia spoke of this interrelationship between their ethnic identity and religious identity as a strong affirmation of self.

I would like to think that there is always the cultural component as a big part of its existence in America, I mean that is what makes it unique and what it is really, the Church of Lebanon. As opposed to just something else that exists as part of American society. (Aziz, third generation)

Cecilia reaffirmed this need for the cultural elements as a Lebanese Catholic:

You know so that ... was always different some of those traditions were separate I think it just means I'm a Lebanese and a Catholic to me. It's very synonymous with being Lebanese, so what does it mean to be a Maronite, and that means that I'm honoring my ethnicity and my religion. At the same time, I'm practicing the Maronite faith. (Cecilia, fourth generation)

Since these participants have identified as Maronite their entire life, it is understandable how its liturgical presentation and close community are reassuring for the individual. The Eastern influence of this Catholic Rite is very important to the congregant in the church-going experience. If the cultural component were absent, there is a strong likelihood that the experience would be altered significantly to the point of possible abandonment of this church site.

The individuality of the Rite within the Catholic Church is a personification of the Lebanese American Catholic in America. The pride of being Lebanese in America is equally important as being proud to be Maronite in the Universal Church. Individuals conveyed a sense of self-importance in that their faith was different from the Latin Rite and attached a persona to this Church as a statement of the Lebanese people is generational. Omar shared his thoughts about distinguishing between the Maronite and Latin rites:

You know when you are in a place that is not Maronite; you still say you are Maronite. I will always make it known to the priest that I am Maronite attending your [Latin] church that is my way of getting back at the Roman Catholic whom I have a hard time with.  
(Omar, third generation)

This secure connection to the liturgy's cultural elements can also be understood as a statement of maintenance of the ancestral history that distinguished this group from other Catholics that has shaped the successive generation. In the preliminary part of the interview, I ask if the participant would like to share their family's immigration story. While some participants, the younger fourth generation were unable to relay any information about their ancestors' immigration story, the older third-generation fondly referenced their ancestral stories throughout the interviews. These stories were laden with imagery of hardship and personal resolve resulting from the oppressive society from which their ancestors arrived. Many of the participants mentioned the religious and economic persecution their ancestors experienced at the Ottomans' hands. Folklore of religious persecution past down by the generation ingrains determination, appreciation and creates a bonding element for this group through their faith. It is this shared heritage of persecution and oppression that they can identify with as Lebanese and Maronites struggling to retain relevancy within the American milieu. Equipped with their ancestors' history and folklore, these individuals unite to make a sanctuary for those who share



the burden of past religious hardships and subrogation. This struggle for their faith in the Eastern lands distinguishes them from other Catholics. Because of the history associated with the faith, they are not willingly ready to forfeit this identity for the Latin Rite because they are Americans.

Faith for like pride or its faith for like the soulfulness ... this is something that we believe in ... sort of it's our churches vs. Roman Catholic churches ... the Maronites have been huge, and you don't see it with other groups, the continuance of this faith in America, I guess Maronites are hard-headed and stubborn, and that is why we are still around [Laugh]. (Aziz, third generation)

It is this ethereal unity that gives significant meaning to their adherence to their Catholic faith. This duality of the church ties into the issue of sustainability, in that its relevancy is dependent on the ability to meet the evolving needs of the members. Respondents stated that having a clear understanding of this Eastern Rite and its rituals would lead to a greater appreciation of the liturgy and increased spirituality among the members of the Church. It is in the fact that the Church has not adapted to the normative American Catholicism that makes it appealing to the successive generations who are comfortable with the current foreign presentation of the liturgy. Further adaptations would lead to an emotional disconnect for the congregants. In the sustainability post-interview survey, respondents spoke of the need to emphasize the Rite's distinctiveness and its value as an Eastern-based faith. Greater emphasis on the worship would include educating members of the traditions and practices starting at a young age up to adulthood.

**Maronite identity and ethnic exceptionality.** Ethnic religions are distinctive in their relationship with an ethnic group and often shape one's solidarity with an ethnic identity. As noted, there is a definite denotation between the Maronite rite and other Catholic rites expressed by the participants. The data collected shows the tendency of the participants to associate the Rite as being "Lebanese" with the purpose is to serve the Lebanese Catholics worldwide. One

participant voiced her belief that the Church's exclusivity is justified for it is a Lebanese birthright:

I began to understand there was this sort of Lebanese tradition of Catholicism that was in communion with Rome but had different rituals and what we were told is as people born to Lebanese immigrants this was our Church. (Mariam, third generation)

The Church's existence worldwide is a statement of the Lebanese diaspora continuation of the faith valued as Eastern Catholics living in the Western world. From the interviews, the idea of the Church being selectively for the Lebanese fits an image this population has created out of necessity for cultural preservation. This population has created reality or identity in which the Church is a necessary element in their ethnic identity affirmation. Without the Church, this identity would be weakened or diminished entirely. It is their participation in the religious behaviors that cement this relationship: "I've never been so proud as to have been born into this culture, and I could not have felt that pride if it was not for the church" (Farah, third generation).

The Church's relationship to Lebanon is a spiritual one; this does not mean that it is exclusive to the Lebanese people or that it is the gatekeeper of the Lebanese culture. Maronites, by definition, are Maronite Church adherents, regardless of ethnicity or place of origin. Being a Maronite is not an ethnic group identity; it is a way worshiping that is available to all regardless of ethnic heritage. However, it is a bounded situation for many of the participants that, through the congregants' perception, are exclusive to the Lebanese culture that has passed down from one generation to the next. It is a socially constructed membership that has overarched the spirituality purpose of the Church and is characterized by the members as ethnic and cultural renewal gained through attendance. "I think that the unique part of being Maronite is how closely it is tied to my ethnicity. I mean, there is no question on the direct relationship between being Lebanese and being a Maronite" (Anthony, fourth generation).

### **Becoming: Elements of the Process of Assimilation**

The last of the three main themes that emerged focuses on the construct of assimilation. There is an understanding of straight-line assimilation that one loses their ethnic identification by the second generation and adopts the host society's culture. In traditional assimilation theory, immigrants and their offspring move toward a state of ethnic neutrality or triviality as they incorporate into the dominant group, which, in the United States., is the White group. In this case study, these participants appear to have achieved entry into the relevant social institutions of the host society and have are not hindered in their opportunities in education, income, intermarriage, and occupations. Based on these individuals' interaction and the results from the demographic questionnaire, each of these participants has completed the assimilation process at this generational level. Although they have all completed assimilation successfully, some have retained their ethnic-religious practices while others have alliances with the Latin rite. This abandonment of ethnic religions supports the assimilation theories that posit that with entry into the American culture comes the abandonment of ethnic-religious institutions associated with their ancestors. Based upon the Latinization of the Lebanese Maronite as means of Americanization, it is most likely that more Lebanese Americans are serving in the Latin rite than American Maronite serving on their own (Kayal & Kayal, 1975).

Going to an ethnic church is not a reliable indicator of assimilation, contrary to most literature dealing with the topic of assimilation and ethnic churches. On the surface, Gordon's assimilation theory is applicable in this study, for this group of the successive generational level appears to be fully assimilated on many pertinent structural levels such as inter-ethnic marriage, highly educated, reside in diverse neighborhoods, without social barriers that prevent full participation in the host society (America). A logical outcome of all of this is widespread

integration is the dissolution of old-country ethnic attachments. This adaption includes the host society's religious identity, especially if the religious institution ties to the specific ethnic group. Although these participants have completed many of the structural assimilation's steps, they have chosen to retain an ethnic and religious identity that is very distinct from most of the society and uniquely tied to their ethnic identity. The members of this group have held on to a reliable ethnic identification supported through religious membership. Cecilia spoke of the unifying mechanism of the church in maintaining a connection to her ethnicity:

I think they [Maronite Churches] were established, it was out of a need to have a presence of Lebanese identity, and there is Arabic that is spoken at these gatherings you know everybody can feel comfortable. (Cecilia, fourth generation)

The data collected show that a definite connection between religion and ethnicity is a strong influence in the identification process among this assimilated population. This church is the base for which they not only rely on for religiousness but maybe even more importantly for interpersonal relationships and affirmation of their ethnic self while successfully thriving within the American milieu in all other aspects of life.

Far removed from the immigrant population and the weakening of ethnic boundaries over generations, this population's secure connection to their ancestral heritage propagates their religious and communal practices tethered to Lebanon's spiritual motherland. Attendance is a thoughtful act that connects them to their ancestral roots, which many recognize is a past that can only be kept alive is through the Maronite Church affiliation. Religion has become the core of their ethnic affirmation, Cecilia spoke of this need of the church in retaining ethnic identity:

So I must think the more removed you are from your roots geographically and maybe even in time the more you would want to sort of reconnecting with them and reconnecting is proactive right because for a Lebanese person specifically, the Maronite Church is a really rich source of old Lebanese traditions. (Cecilia, fourth generation)

The assimilation theory underestimates the resilience of ethnicity and religion among this group. This population demonstrates that the assimilation process does not always result in the abandonment of ethnic identity. Instead, it can be modified to meet specific populations' needs, such as this one, which has deliberately retained their identity as assimilated Americans. This population has successfully retained a robust ethnic identity through their religious practices at a church that is distinctly ethnic in its presentation. The balance between the two identities, American and Lebanese, has been allowed to flourish due to the community's unwavering commitment to retaining their ancestral heritage through their worship practices.

**Self-identification of subsequent generations.** Complete assimilation means the erosion of ethnic antipathies partly predicated on the decline of ethnic identities and the rise of unhyphenated American identities. In this case, it is the individual's own words that spoke of being Lebanese and Maronite, both of which are not mainstream identities. While this group of Lebanese descendants has fully embraced the American culture, it is a conscious identity that allows them to fully explain who they are within American society and the Catholic Church. It is an identification that is assigned by the individual that takes on more meaning for these individuals who do not feel the declining sense of their heritage once assimilated. In this study, none of the participants demonstrated ethnic attrition or responded to the pan-ethnic description of Middle Eastern or White. This unconscious process of straight-line assimilation predicts that over time immigrants become "unhyphenated," dropping their national or ancestral origins as their primary identity and assuming an American identity as the former fades from central to peripheral in their daily lives. When examining the demographic questionnaire responses, every individual self identifies as either Lebanese or hyphenated Lebanese American identity, even though they are third and fourth generation Americans, some of which are only partial Lebanese.

Of these participants, the results showed that five of these participants identified as Lebanese, without hyphenation, suggesting these participants firmly identify to this ethnic heritage. Although, by all accounts, these individuals demonstrate full assimilation into American society, yet of these participants, 6 participants spoke Arabic fluently, and 33% of the married participants were married to Lebanese. The follow-up question asked how vital their ethnic identity was to their identity formation; 20 participants responded that it was important (6 participants) to very important (14 participants). The strong self-awareness of this population suggests that although assimilated, they have been active in maintaining their ethnic identity as Americans. In particular, the established communities allowed for the continued fellowship of ethnic traditions combined with cultural reinforcements such as traditional foods, music, language, and folk customs that preserved Lebanese existence outside of its native land.

**Assimilation and religious ideology.** Religious assimilation refers to the adoption of a majority or dominant culture's religious practices and beliefs by a minority of subcultures. It is a necessary form of cultural assimilation. Religious assimilation includes the religious conversion of individuals from a minority faith to the dominant faith. Some religions and sociological backgrounds are more compatible with American founding principles, making a person better able to assimilate into this country. Many ethnic groups, even some of the early Lebanese immigrants, often would accept and attend the American Latin rite churches immediately upon their arrival. Entry into the American religious institution, dominated by European Catholics, allowed hastened assimilation process through association. Those who attended American Catholic churches were certain to have acculturated quicker to the American culture in many

areas of their lives, including language and behavior, to fit into this group without feeling alienated.

This religious assimilation occurred among the successive generations, where they moved from the Maronite Church to the dominant Latin rite churches for various reasons. The participants interviewed who are not practicing Maronite did not move away entirely from the Catholic Church. Instead, they altered their choice of churches to attend rather than sweeping changes in their religious belief system. When soliciting participants for this study, many known individuals lived in San Antonio that were members of the church's Latin rite. Of those approached, the six who participated were active members of their local Latin rite churches in San Antonio.

Because of the lack of Maronite parochial schools in this town, most of the attending participants attended Latin rite Catholic schools. All the participants attended Catholic schools as children and spoke of their experience with the dominant Latin rite through parochial schooling. Although they attended Catholic schools, each noted that they never felt that they had ever abandoned their Maronite rite because it was always a salient part of their upbringing and the one true faith for them. Although they have exposure to the Latin rite on a consistent level growing up, there remains a secure connection to their Maronite faith practiced on Sundays. For example, Ameen spoke of his upbringing in the Catholic school system and the impact it had on his outlook: "absolutely. And that even going to the Roman Catholic Church every day in grade school and even high school. I still only feel complete with the Maronite faith" (Ameen, fourth generation). The transplanted church in America continues to operate overall as a separate ethnic enclave of society, influencing the religious experience for the members who have adapted to the host society and its customs and culture. For some, this idea of moving away from the ancestral

religious practices is not conceivable. The church is one of the last markers available to them that allows for the expression of their Lebanese culture. They inherited from their forefathers that this group has consciously retained their religious affiliation even after complete cultural assimilation in other aspects of culture.

**Assimilation and symbolic ethnicity.** In the late stages of assimilation or once assimilation completed, many individuals may choose to retain certain parts of their ethnicity through association and participation, creating peoplehood based exclusively on their ethnic heritage and symbols. Symbolic ethnicity explains behaviors among an assimilated group and deals with the resiliency of cultural differences among this population. This aftermath of assimilation among some successive generations is the choice to retain some aspects of their culture that are easily attainable. Such groups often cling to certain selective cultural traits that become symbolic of ethnic identities, such as limited language, food, music, and religion. These cultural markers are examples of cultural features which, because of their symbolic associations, provide individuals within ethnic groups a means of expressing ethnic identity and openly demonstrate their commonality with other members of the group. For the attending Maronites, the church is a singular all-encompassing marker of the culture. This multidimensional marker was created and held on to as an accurate representation of the assimilated population's Lebanese culture in America. It is a means of connecting to their ancestral roots in a manner that they are comfortable with and is easily accessible. The participants have a nostalgic allegiance to the immigrant generation, believing that their loyalty to the faith is a means of celebrating their ancestral heritage. The creation of ethnicity is an attempt to recreate a past association or feel lost or weakened in the Lebanese American everyday life.



The church is one of the few places and situations where many of these individuals can celebrate their secular heritage through church-sponsored cultural events that take place throughout the year. Cecilia noted the benefits of membership for cultural renewal:

So I must think the more removed you are from your roots geographically and maybe even in time the more you would want to sort of reconnecting with them and reconnecting is by active right because for a Lebanese person specifically, the Maronite Church is a really rich source of old Lebanese traditions. (Cecilia, fourth generation)

The Maronite Church celebrates its heritage through many culturally relevant fundraisers and festivities that are open to the broader San Antonio community. It is an opportunity to attract all Lebanese regardless of their religious attendance patterns. These events include “Magic is the Night,” Mahajan, St. Maron’s Festival, Lebanese Festival, and monthly Lebanese Dinners. All these sponsored events are open to the broader San Antonio community yet are most frequented by Lebanese Americans. They are not limited to the Maronite community, allowing individuals who do not wish to partake in the religious services an opportunity to experience their ethnic roots. For many of the participants, it is the few times in which this group partakes in many cultural markers, such as language, food, music, and dance shared with fellow Lebanese regardless of their religious attachment. Of the 15 Maronite participants completing the preliminary survey, all have attended cultural events sponsored by the church throughout the year. These events offered these church members the opportunity to lead with organizing, volunteering, and community building. Anthony, a young practicing Maronite, the events are a valuable social event that is relatable to his understanding of the culture:

In our particular Parish there were there was really no distinction between your faith and your community so any Lebanese Community event I attended growing up and to this day was directly related to the Maronite Church whether it was festivals, dance recitals, and gatherings where you feel connected. (Anthony, fourth generation)

Among the non-attending, the limited exposure was through social, cultural gatherings such as festivals or cultural events sponsored by the church. All but one non-attending participant responded that they do go to cultural events sponsored by the church and find these events enjoyable and relatable as Lebanese Americans. Yasmine, a non-attending participant, shared her attachment to such cultural markers: “Although I’ve made to the choice to stay away from the religious church services, I still continue to enjoy the social interactions and familial relationships that still exist through church functions and events” (Yasmine, fourth generation).

Among the younger fourth-generation participants from the church community, there was a definite linking to the symbols of the culture in their ethnic identity without a complete understanding of the culture itself. The younger participants’ understanding of the culture was based on overt superficial symbols of the culture without a thorough understanding of the essence of the Lebanese culture brought by the ancestors to America. For this group of fourth-generation participants, “being Lebanese” means indulging in superficial cultural markers such as dance, music, food, and a handful of Arabic words. This understanding of the culture through markers was a prominent theme among the younger participants. For example, Malik spoke of the rejuvenation of heritage through these elements: “You know the dance, food, and music ... all the cultural things that connect us to the Heritage exactly” (Malik, fourth generation). This generation understands that their ancestral roots are a morphed ideology created by their family and the broader community. This group has held onto specific parts of the culture and utilizes these symbols to reaffirm their ethnic identity and pass it on to the next generation. For these young adults, the imagery of “what is Lebanese” is founded on remnants of the culture recreated and promoted to fit into their lives. They understand their ethnicity by the symbols that represent the culture and are easily adapted. These participants can define who they are as an ethnic entity

and openly celebrate and sustain their heritage in ways that make sense to them and are familiar with whether it is authentic.

When examining the topic of sustainability as related to symbolic ethnicity, it concerns that this form of ethnic identity is weak. This younger group of attending participants has possibly arrived at a point where the Maronite Church is merely a marker of their Lebanese heritage, which might eventually hold less meaning over time and only visited on limited occasions. For the church to maintain relevancy, it must be seen as more than merely a marker of culture; it must be a place that has significance on many levels and not limited to cultural renewal alone. If the church becomes merely a cultural placeholder for the successive generations, it will no longer fulfill its sole obligation as spiritual guidance for its members. The choice to remain at the church in the following generations might depend on the value it holds for the individual who may see it as merely a symbol of ethnicity.

**Assimilation and changing population.** The data gathered from the narratives seemed to focus on the relationship between the Maronite Church's role in maintaining and promoting the unique ethnic customs supporting group solidarity. Since this church has served a purpose for many in meeting the needs of this ethnic group, which depends on its ethnic identification and loyalty to the church of their forefathers, the issue of sustainability comes about dealing with generational changes. The understanding that with each new generation, there is a weakening of the ethnic identity plays into the need to examine the relationship between ethnic affirmation and the church's role. One of the most pressing concerns relating to the topic of sustainability of the Maronite Church in San Antonio is centered on the inevitable changing population and changing needs of the future congregants. Many descendants of the early Maronite immigrants have abandoned their ethnic identification almost entirely by the third and fourth generation, with only

a small population actively retaining the Maronite heritage. There are various explanations of the next generation (fourth and fifth) leaving the church membership, ranging from changing cities, disenfranchisement, intercultural marriage, secularism, and some have accepted the Latin rite for ease or to follow their spouses. Nora noted that with a large number of intermarriages, outside of the ethnic group, outside of the Maronite faith or Catholicism, would impact the church membership:

I mean as more and more Lebanese marry outside of their culture, the population is going to be diluted, and I think that this would result in more and more Lebanese going to different churches...to follow their spouses and such. Moreover, this would change the population but not necessarily mean its extinction [Maronite Church]. (Nora, fourth generation)

The narratives suggest that the progression of assimilation among the successive generations has created a new population, one that does not see affiliation as a means of maintaining ethnic identity because they are subjected to different social and cultural influences. Mariam, an older third-generation Maronite, sees the church as a safe place utilized when a need is expressed:

I think it's like any group some will stay loyal, some will move on once they feel like they do not need that little island or that little Refuge when you think of the church, and then you move on. (Mariam, third generation)

Many of the children of the attending participants have moved away from the church in most part, exercising their choice in their church-going behavior that fits their individuals' needs. This is already happening in the non-attending group, where all at one time or another had attended with their families but have made a choice as adults not to attend. This idea that the church does not hold the same level of importance and relevancy among the next generation was one that was often acknowledged by the older generation of Maronites during their responses relating to the future generations. Although they see the benefits of church participation, they

find it hard to convince their children of its value. Of the attending participants interviewed that were the third generation, only a few were able to confidently state that their children are active members of the church and community. It is the secure connection that is felt by the members that are assumed to mean the same for their children; however, this is not always the case. Aziz asserts that the church would be the place to connect to the ethnic heritage: “What can I do to make my children feel more Lebanese, and the church seems to be the perfect place for that” (Aziz, third generation).

Of the 15 attending individuals interviewed, a majority offered unsolicited insight into their children’s attendance patterns. This concern for their children’s abandonment of the church was noticeable among these parents who had built their lives around this church and who now witness its abandonment by their children. Whether this sense of abandonment directed at the loss of religious ideology or ethnic identity was uncertain since, for this group, the two constructs are interchangeable. This exhibited apprehension could represent the changing population that has moved away from their culture and from the institution that has been put in place to promote this culture among this population. Anthony spoke of his attempt to get his children to attend: “It is kind of hard to push the younger generation. They are not enthusiastic; they just think the church is a one and one thing only.” He presents how it is meaningful for him: “It is just basically ... basically, if you tell them about the great benefits of going to church. You see all your friends, fellowship, the commonality. Basically, the interaction you do not find anyplace else” (Anthony, fourth-generation). Although the affiliation at this church is valued by those interviewed who have regular attendance, there was a sense of regret in that their children are not as involved as they are and do not share the same sense of belonging. Omar reflected how

his children not only do not attend the Maronite Church but have fallen away from the Catholic faith:

You know I look upon the archway of the church and think ... my children they may tell people they are Maronite, but they are not. Because they do not, in fact, for all practical purposes, attend anything. (Omar, third generation)

Lina shared a similar sentiment about her children's attendance patterns:

I am forcing them now because I know at some point I cannot anymore and I just hope that it be has become a part of who they are so that they will need it like I needed it. (Lina, third generation)

The parents' value and gain from this association are not shared by their children, which was a concern for these individuals.

So I honored his commitment because I thought that was a great thing to have a multi-generational commitment to one parish. He [husband] certainly expected his children to go to weekly mass at St. George now, but they really do not go as much as we do. Do I see my children and grandchildren being an active member? I do, but that's probably wishful thinking. (Mariam, third generation).

The data shows that for some of these children, the reason for non-attendance related to the changing environment caused by a move from their parents' home. Aziz's reflects on this severing of control by distance:

Well, my ... you know the children were there, and we would go there but then as they went away, they all went away to school, you know they were in places where to their minds it was more difficult to be associated with the Maronite Church. Although I hope they will someday return to going to the Maronite Church. (Aziz, third generation)

### **Summary of Data Analysis**

The data show that the church's ability to remain relevant for multi-generational levels is due to the maintenance of a strong ethnic identity among the Lebanese population and the connection this church retains to Lebanon and its culture. The unique identity of the Maronite rite was a common element of satisfaction when discussing reasons for attendance. Since its

establishment, the community has been unified by its shared ethnicity and family lineage, solidifying its social identity. The Maronite rite's distinctive liturgical essence further strengthens the connection between the members' sacred and secular identity. This church competes in the Catholic marketplace with its unique and distinct practices and the cultural bond it has with the congregants, heightening participation. The church is both ethnic and religious and, as a result, can mobilize its members and offer religious consumers ethnic as well as religious goods. This is a valuable and essential part of a church community and allows for its members' satisfaction.

To ensure the church's ability to continue its mission of providing a distinct liturgy, many members suggested a more significant emphasis on understanding the rite in a bid to increase appreciation and loyalty. All the participating congregants spoke of the liturgy's uniqueness, and if there were any adaptations or Americanization, they would be very dissatisfied. If the church changed to meet the needs of a broader base of congregants, they would feel that it would lose its attraction and be like any other Catholic church in San Antonio. The population is changing; this is an outcome of assimilation that cannot be slowed or reversed. With time, the church has become an active gatekeeper of the Lebanese culture, which many still desire to identify with even as they have adapted and thrive in American society. The issue of continued affirmation of the culture through attendance is important amongst this the current congregants. To remain competitive in the religious institution marketplace, it must maintain this same level of importance for the future congregants. The future population may not have the same enthusiasm for the church. However, if the church continues to function as a definite entity without sacrificing its mission, there is the likelihood that the newly arrived immigrant population,

although significantly smaller than the original immigrant population, will begin the cycle of the church and grow with the church over the next generations.



## **Chapter VI: RESULTS AND SUMMARY**

In the past, ethnic Catholic churches in America were heavily dominated by European immigrant populations, such as German, Polish, Italian, and Irish. These ethnic churches were under the Latin rite, with the primary variance found in the cultural essence of each community. For the Catholic churches established by European immigrants in America, adaptation occurred without changing the basic theological principles of customary observances characteristic of the governing rite. For example, for these ethnic churches to fit into the religious institutional norm in America, adaptation could occur within the boundaries of the Latin rite and therefore be a matter of adopting its liturgical language, appointing American-born parish priest, and accepting a broader heterogeneous congregation already unified in the same ceremonial actions and specific forms of religious practices and traditions of the Latin rite. In contrast, the Maronite Church follows the Eastern rite and is innately varied and countercultural to the Western religious norms and customs. Adaptation for the Maronite Church would be more involved than merely changing the liturgical vernacular or striving for a more diverse population unfamiliar with the rite. The Maronite Church belongs to a separate rite, the Antiochian rite, meaning that it cannot change its conventional ways and religious customs completely for temporal acceptance among its followers living in America and still retain its sacred integrity. This rite was created and sustained from a Middle Eastern perspective. Its theological elements are identifiable to the people by those who established it and whom it continues to serve (predominately Lebanese). Although the Church serves a worldwide population, it has retained its inherited language, music, art, and customs that are deeply rooted in the Lebanese culture. Considering this fact, survival in the American culture is complicated and uncertain if there is no effort to understand the Church's lasting relevance among the diasporas. The findings from the data gathered from

participating Maronites shed light on the most substantial influencing factors that have resulted in a continued engagement at St. George Maronite Church in San Antonio among the successive generations, despite the inherent difficulty in doing so.

Looking at sustainability issues, the continuation of a lasting relationship among this population is grounded in *this* reality of the rite's distinctiveness, and it is this ritualistic rigidity that gives meaning and significance to the members' church-going experience. Because it has retained its distinct Eastern identity, it has a captive audience in the religious institution's marketplace. Today, the Maronite Church in San Antonio offers a select population a place to gather and worship together in a manner that is satisfying and rewarding at many levels. Although this select population of Lebanese descendants has created a modified or hybrid culture that allows the members to fit in American society with ease while maintaining a strong ethnic identity, this may not be the path of the future generations. As the next generations continue their integration into American society, the future relevance of the church is dubious as its congregation continues to assimilate. This chapter explores the meaning gleaned from the findings, the theoretical foundation applicable to the results, the significance of the findings, limitations of the research, and recommendations for future research.

## **Findings Discussion**

Based on the rich descriptive data, the findings show a strong symbiotic relationship between the sacred and the secular. The members most value the underlying reliance on the Lebanese cultural elements of the Maronite rite. It is the foundation of the social-psychological attachment that the members have formed within the community. The data collected during this study support the understanding that this group's ethnic identity has been shaped, reshaped, and grounded through its membership in this mono-ethnic religious setting. The survival of this

church in San Antonio allows for the valued ancestral sacred traditions that distinguish this group in a manner that is profoundly meaningful for its members who seek affirmation and maintenance of their ethnic self. If there were a dilution of the ethnic presence in the church-going experience (adaptation or Americanization), there would be a strong likelihood that the level of meaningfulness would diminish significantly, and its Lebanese American membership would drop to unsustainable levels. The key to addressing the growth of the church is to look within its walls and focus on the current population. The relevant ethnic essence of the rite has created a unified community that has allowed it to be sustained across the generations, and sustainability can be achieved without forfeiting the identity of the Maronite rite. Over the generations, this close-knit group has created a place that its members can rely on for ethnic maintenance, and they are committed to its preservation. When addressing sustainability issues, the capacity of the institution and its members is a solid unit, which can be drawn on to assure that the church remains a complete place for both sacred and secular renewal.

The themes relating to attendance practice patterns among the successive generations include ethnic, social, and religious identity, as well as the impact of assimilation on the sustainability of the church. These findings are relevant within the scope of the study because each emergent theme provides a deeper understanding of the Maronite Church and its congregation in San Antonio, which will add to other studies regarding not only the Maronite rite in America but also the connection between ethnicity and religion as it relates to the sustainability of ethnic churches in America. The findings strongly support the fact that this Maronite Church relies on the continued ethnic identification of its members. In turn, the strong ethnic identity of the church is fundamental to its continued relevance as a distinct rite.

The binding reason for the church-going participants' strong alliance to the Maronite Church is embedded in its theological traditions and liturgical practices that are deeply rooted in the Lebanese culture and the social-psychological connection to a community that comprises mostly American of descent. In its expansion to other countries, the Maronite Church has become an expression of social belonging and a place marker of cultural renewal for the successive generations living in lands far removed from their ancestral land of Lebanon. The importance of the church as an object of cultural renewal is a natural byproduct of a modified assimilation process, which often necessitates an identifiable representation of heritage as a means of gaining a better sense of self. This continued religious affiliation comes to stand for something more than religious obligation, becoming meaningful as an idealized sense of ethnic identity through defined ideas about the experience when shared with similar individuals who are conversant in this same understanding. Attendance is an act that allows the Lebanese Americans in San Antonio to maintain a connection to their ancestral heritage, which they still strongly identify with as Americans, both as individuals and as a collective group.

The findings suggest that the combination of social belonging and identification with the Maronite faith is the most substantial influence that dictates the Lebanese Americans' behavior and attendance patterns. The fact that the attending participants have consciously decided to retain their ethnicity and preserve the ethnic-religious practices at this generational level. Nonetheless, there is the inevitable possibility that assimilation will continue to affect the behaviors of the future generations that may no longer identify with their ancestral heritage in a manner that is necessary for the continuation of this church in San Antonio. In interpreting the data at various levels, it becomes apparent that assimilation has occurred for these sample participants, with a noted change in perspective on the role of the church, as evident in the two

generational groups. While both generational groups in the sample of attending participants are cognizant of the social-psychological benefits of membership, the fourth-generation group's engagement places greater emphasis on the cultural tenets of their membership as influencers of attendance. When examining both generational groups of attending and non-attending participants, the findings offer a clear description of the strength of each theme in the narratives of these Lebanese American populations in San Antonio.

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the third generation attending participants are cognizant of both the sacred and secular cultural benefits of membership, the fourth-generation group's engagement places greater emphasis on the cultural tenets of their membership as influencers of attendance. When examining both generational groups of attending and non-attending participants, the findings offer a clear description of the strength of each theme in the narratives of these Lebanese American populations in San Antonio.

### **Being: Ethnic Identity Development**

In modern usage, ethnicity refers to the way that a group identifies itself based on its language, place of origin, shared culture, and history (Eickelman, 1989). This self-identification of Lebanese ethnicity provides a positive view of oneself and the group and its membership as a collective (Maronite). In this study, the participants engage in a broad range of activities that indicate that their identity is grounded in their behaviors, as related to their religious group as a collective entity. As conveyed throughout the narratives, ethnic identity is one of the most reliable fundamental elements found in each of the three major generated themes of social identity, religious identity, and assimilation. Each emergent theme supports the concept of ethnic identity formation, affirmation, and maintenance (the subthemes) through expressed behaviors. The findings indicate that the perceived cultural identification of this rite tends to strengthen the participants' ethnic identity,

Ethnic identity refers to one's sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one's thinking, perceptions, feelings and behavior that is due to ethnic group membership. Ethnic identity is separate from one's personal identity as an individual, although the two may reciprocally influence each other

-Phinney, 2000

which in turn influences their behavioral involvement. Ethnic consciousness supports the rationale for a continued engagement at this site and membership in the Maronite community as a means of preservation of their ethnic self as Lebanese American Catholics. These individuals are fully engaged in their ethnic self-identity during their social and religious interactions, and many indicate that only during these bounded interactions, both sacred and secular, do they feel genuinely Lebanese.

The most significant theme that emerges from the data is the importance of ethnic identity among the congregants, this being a central element linking all other emergent themes. All three emergent subthemes are interconnected, dependent on one another, and bounded by the ethnic consciousness of the participant. Active religious engagement supports an understanding of the ethnic self, and this identity is reaffirmed at various levels (social, psychological, and religious) and through internal and external adaptations that the participants engage in as Americans. All three emergent themes are interconnected and dependent on one another. It is the ethnic identity characteristic core of each theme that provides a robust, effective impact on the participants' actions and is guided by the vision of the site. A clear understanding of the interrelationship among the three themes, with ethnic identity as the core, will add to the development and the success of a sustainability plan. Therefore, examining the significance of the core theme of ethnic affirmation and its relationship with the other emergent themes will provide clarity on the most influential elements that promote continued engagement at this church. Identifying motivators for continued engagement will provide clarity on the reasons for the continued attendance when formulating a capability plan. The plan can be implemented by the institution when addressing the evolving needs of the members.

**Role of the Maronite Church in ethnic identity achievement.** A strong desire for a continued connection to Lebanon has propagated the collective consciousness of one church, one people, for those who have dwelt in other countries over the past century. Being Maronite is not an ethnic group identity but a religious entity identity. However, in the perception of this study's participants, it is a bounded situation that is exclusive to the Lebanese culture. Although the vision of the church is that of spiritual guidance, it has, in effect, become a cultural institution of ethnic preservation among a population wishing to retain a connection to its ancestral roots through membership. This perception has been passed down from one generation to the next and has become a reality created by the third- and fourth-generation participants. As a result, the expression of their ancestral religious traditions and practices leads to a more salient identity that is highly relevant and implicit to this group of successive generations. These distinctive forms of worship offer salience to the identity of the participants who otherwise might have abandoned their ethnic identity as Lebanese Americans due to the lack of available cultural markers. Their identity is embedded in this structured social context, and self-identification can be activated as needed.

Initially, the Maronite Church was established in America to provide a safety net for the early Lebanese immigrants. Cultural preservation through religious practices was the foundation of their community, for which spiritual guidance, cultural renewal, and psychological support were amassed in a centralized location (St. George Maronite Church) as they navigated their new lives in a foreign land. For the current attending participants, the church represents the physical location where their ancestors came together to worship in a manner relevant to their cultural identity rooted in the liturgy. The ritualist role of the church, its practices, and its traditions solidify a sense of security and familiarity, handed down through the generations through a



sacred devotion. The members of this faith-based community feel a strong sense of pride and obligation to the ancestral sacred legacy they have inherited and acknowledge as a substantial part of their individual histories. The preservation of the rite and the church in San Antonio is a means of conserving their personal histories and honoring their past through the celebration of the liturgy in the same manner across the generations. For this population, religion remains the primary identifying factor of ethnic distinction and formation in which the practices of this faith are affirmations of heritage, family, and belonging.

The identity of the church is crucial to the identity formation of its followers in San Antonio and has allowed the coherence of heritage continuity that binds this group. The presence of a sacred connection to the participants' ethnic identity reinforces the tie between the two and allows it to become a salient part of this ethnic identity. As the successive generations of members have moved further away from the cultural core of Lebanon in time and space, the church has become a socially constructed institution characterized by its members as a place of ethnic and cultural renewal through attendance. Even though there are areas of life where they have discarded their ancestral customs and traditions, they have held on tightly to this religious identity as a means of ethnic identity confirmation. The findings establish that the identity of the individual as Lebanese is reinforced by the sacred culture of the Maronite Church because of this rite's strong ties to the ancestral land. The rite's explicit Eastern culture has supported the identity formation either consciously or unconsciously among its current congregation in a manner that provides a social context that is perceived as necessary for the transmission of family values and cultural renewal through participation. The individuals speak of the distinct rite, rooted in their Lebanese culture, and its direct confirmation in solidifying the ethnic self. This awareness increases their overall religious experience and adds to their felt allegiance to the

faith. It is their membership and religious behaviors that enhance and preserve their self-image as Lebanese. The Maronite Church is the vessel in which the Lebanese understand and celebrate their commitment to who they are as Lebanese Americans.

Unlike other ethnic groups, the dilution or abandonment of Lebanese ethnic identity has not occurred at this generational level (Gordon, 1964; Herberg, 1973; Hirschman, 2004; Nelsen & Allen, 1974). As such, despite their alienation from and abandonment of the religious institution associated with their ancestral heritage, they have managed to allow it to remain an aspect of their lives, at least in supporting their ethnic identity. This work is in contrast to the notion that ethnic abandonment is inevitably a byproduct of assimilation by the second generation and that if there is sentience, it is fleeting and observed in a symbolic manner (Gans, 1979). These two groups of participants (church attendees and non-attendees) individually and collectively retained a distinct ethnic identity and engage in it regularly through their religious institutional affiliation. As supported by Khachan's (2015) work, the Church is one of the more positive means in which ethnic identity can be acknowledged and promoted in its contextual relevance as a religious institution rooted in the confines of the Lebanese culture. Although Khachan's study focuses on the immigrant population, there is evidence that this continued reliance on the Maronite Church as a place for ethnic identity formation is apparent among the successive generations desiring a connection to their ancestral roots. This work demonstrates the importance of church affiliation in identity preservation among a population that remains attuned to the cultural nuances of Lebanon, the immigrant population. However, this study looks at a population that is removed from Lebanon in time and space by three and four generations; the value of church affiliation is varied due to these factors. What the subsequent generation gains from their membership vary due to the differing needs expressed by the participants. For the

participants, the church remains a positive means of ethnic identity embedded in the social identity and the religious identity of individuals who are integrated into the American normative culture. As a result, the ethnic identity value internalized by the participant is different from that of the immigrant and, for that reason, deserves a deeper understanding of how this ethnic consciousness is expressed.

**Interrelationship of ethnic identity and social identity.** The findings propose that the subjective dimension of ethnic identity manifested within the boundaries of the church in San Antonio is both an external expression of this identity (Maronite) and an internal identification of membership (congregants). It is the value placed on membership within this faith-based community that creates a sense of solidarity that reinforced through religious practices. Membership is determined not only from shared religious ideology but from the connections these individuals have created over the generations built from shared histories, family lineage, and generational level. Phinney (1992) theorizes that individuals identify themselves as members of certain social groups and their relationships within these groups. These social-psychological boundaries lead to a behavior pattern so that group inclusion is guaranteed (Barth, 1969). Being part of a group involves boundaries that are observed by the members and support the criteria for determining membership; in this case, being Lebanese is a characteristic of membership. The findings support the constructs of the social identity theory manifestation, in that the church bounds the members' shared ethnic identity. It dictates the behaviors for acceptance in this community. The perception of a direct relationship between being Lebanese and being Maronite is ingrained in the identity of the community and is one of the most dominant forces in the social identity of the individual: "When we were growing up, as we knew it, being Maronite was the same as being Lebanese" (Aziz, third generation). This connection between the two constructs,

Lebanese and Maronite, strengthens imagery created by the participants. This notion of the two being the same allows a continued alliance to the church due to the desire for ethnic maintenance. Communal consciousness of worthiness is tied to a collective sacred reality and expressed through membership in this community. Belonging to a selective social group tied to the church promotes a high level of commitment to the church and loyalty among its community members. The members share an external behavior of religious affiliation, as well as an internal notion relating to their self-identification as Lebanese, which promotes their sense of belonging. In this way, ethnic identity, manifested through external expressions of attendance, is a shared behavior pattern, supporting the internal boundaries of self-identification. The latter is, in turn, maintained by the socialization process of intergroup relationships that reinforce this sense of belonging within this ethnic group.

Tajfel and Turner (1986) theorize that ethnic identity is inherently a social construct. One of the most crucial parts of the development of ethnic identity is bounded by social gatherings or groups with which people identify. Their social interactions and interpersonal relationships support their sense of belonging to this exclusive group, built on their inherited religious beliefs and ethnic heritage. In this case, the ethnic ties form an extension of kinship affinities and cultural alliances, combined with their shared faith that further deepens the feeling of camaraderie among this selected population. The Maronite Church community has provided a place where many individuals belong to a selective social environment that promotes their self-concept as Lebanese American Catholics. Individuals who abide by the boundaries set by the congregants are accepted by fellow congregants who share these traits and characteristics, as being in the inner circle of the church. In contrast, others who do not fit the created imagery of being a Maronite are perceived as outsiders by these congregants who have created these criteria.

The sense of group membership to a distinctive faith and the importance of the resulting group socialization, as it pertains to their ethnic identity, are viewed as liberating by many of the participants, as noted in their responses. This membership in this exclusive faith-based community allows the individual to feel accepted, whereas, in other social settings in their lives, they might feel like outsiders because of their core variance identification as Lebanese. For many of these individuals who have held on to their ethnic identity as Lebanese Americans, with the sense of not fitting in completely or being different in the broader societal setting, the church community offers a place of refuge and solidarity. "I think that for me, that church is the only space for expressing who I am" (Omar, third generation). The unique identity of the Maronite Church offers the members a social outlet to connect to their ancestral roots in a cathartic non-judgmental way through behaviors that are acceptable and shared as a group at various levels of social interaction. When looking at the issue of continued viability, the church must take into account the high level of social identity that is bounded by their shared ethnic heritage with the rite. The uniqueness of this faith-based community rests on the fact that it is a gathering place for Lebanese Americans, who like their ancestors, seek out a place that promotes cultural preservation through religious practices. The strength of this community built upon generations of Lebanese who have tied their ethnic consciousness to their faith has supported its longevity. Relationships have been created and reinforced due to their shared heritage. It is the meaningfulness of these relationships to the individual that has allowed for continued self-affirmation as Lebanese. If the church were to diminish the overarching value of social identity in the pursuit of a purely religious identity, disregarding the organic needs of the individual, the results might impact the level of belonging that cements the loyalty of the members.

**Ethnic assertion among subsequent generations.** Chong's (1997) work focusing on the construction of ethnic identity among subsequent generations, suggests that religious churches can play a significant role in their members' search for identity, especially among successive or subsequent generations. The role of the Maronite Church is meaningful for this sample population of successive generations due to its unyielding ties to the Lebanese culture, as found in the religious customs and theological teachings. The participants' strong ethnic identity as Lebanese is expressed and exhibited through their active participation in the Maronite Church. Most of the participants at the third- and the fourth-generation levels speak of the notion that the two constructs, Maronite and Lebanese, are interconnected and that one has little meaning without the other. Being part of this religious community re-affirms their ethnic self-identity and cultural consciousness as Lebanese because this group's members have chosen to retain their sacred identity as Maronites in the cultural milieu of America and American Catholicism. It is the continuance of this strong ethnic identity among this group that has sustained this church's existence over time through the generations and will likely be a strong contributor to the sustainability of the church for future generations that continue to hold on to their ethnic identity.

Whereas up to this point, this sample population is unique in the fact that ethnic identity has remained steady among subsequent generations, this same trajectory is not guaranteed for the next generations. Issues will arise if future generations move away from their ethnic identity and no longer feel the need for active renewal or the desire to express their ethnic identity through church affiliation. Findings give evidence that the continued ethnic identification of the Lebanese American is essential in the maintenance and growth of the Maronite in San Antonio. The Maronite Church has experienced continual loyalty over the generations as a result of the individual's desire for ethnic affirmation; however, if the following generations integrate into the

American culture, abandonment of this ethnicity will occur. The cultural elements that attract the current population will no longer be identified among the following generations, and levels of engagement will be impacted. When the church is no longer identifiable by the individual who has abandoned their ethnicity, it will become obsolete over time.

Although this study's primary focus is to gain an understanding of the influencing factors that support continued engagement among the subsequent generation Maronites, another aim of the study is to examine the reasons why individuals belonging to the same generational level are disengaged. Based on accepted theories of assimilation and ethnic-religious affiliation, the gradual abandonment of ethnic identity among subsequent generations results in an abandonment of their religious institutions (Gordon, 1961; Herberg, 1973; Hirschman, 2004). The church-attending population counters this assumption with the maintenance of the ethnic-religious patterns of their immigrant ancestors; however, ethnic-religious patterns are not sustained by their counterparts from the same generational level. It could be assumed from these behaviors of the non-attendees as the result of being further assimilated and thus have abandoned their ethnic identity, as evident in their disengagement from the Maronite faith of their forefathers. However, the findings show that this is not the case. The non-attending participants belong to the same generational level as that of the attending participants and share similar ethnic identity awareness.

Although attendance is a reinforcement of identity for the attending participants, it is not necessary for the non-attendees. Instead, the findings demonstrate that these disengaged individuals can realize their ethnicity outside of church affiliation and, as a result, do not rely on the Maronite rituals and practices and community for affirmation of their ethnic self. These individuals seem equally confident about their ethnicity without maintaining the customs and

behaviors that are predominant in this ethnic church membership (Macias, 1966; Phinney, 2000).

These individuals view their choice of not being part of the Maronite Church as separate from their ethnic self-affirmation. This delineation between the sacred and the secular identities stands in stark contrast to the narratives of the Maronite Churchgoers. The non-attending commitment of their ethnic identity stops at awareness without further action to support this identity.

Participation in the ritualistic practices of the Maronite liturgy does not affirm their ethnic identity or give meaning to their church-going experience as Catholics. The findings show that the benefits of Maronite Church attendance for cultural renewal are outweighed by the lack of connection that these individuals feel toward the congregation in this faith-based community.

### **Belonging: Social Identity**

One of the most prevalent influences for continued engagement among successive generations of attending participants is that of social-psychological identity development. During the data collection and analysis, it becomes evident to me that a solid sense of fellowship has been created from the salient social context (community), explicitly derived from the participants' affiliation to the Maronite Church. The Maronite community on this site is an organic unit that accepts participants wishing to feel a connection through religious and social interactions, whether with a few members, groups in this church, or the larger sacred organization. The impact of attendance conceptualizes this salience on the individual, and the perception of belonging, experienced from the membership in this faith-based community, is greatly enhanced. The core of the strong sense of belonging is rooted in the fact that the majorities of members share a common ethnic heritage and have shared familial and group histories. Their social interactions and interpersonal relationships support this sense of belonging, bounded by shared familial attendance patterns, ethnic heritage, and commitment to



the preservation of the faith. The choice to be part of the Maronite Church is the individuals' ascription of their ethnic identity that gives meaning to the religious practices and the social relations in the structured situation of the church. The participants' reflexive classification of being Lebanese and Maronite creates a sense of self that is discernible and promotes the feeling of belonging that is a distinctive social-psychological categorization. More importantly, for this group, it is the notion that self-identification as Maronite is a behavior that completes the concept of identity for each participant as Lebanese. In this bounded environment, these attending participants not only choose to be perceived as Lebanese and express this ethnicity openly, but they have the same expectations as those of others who interact within the group and are collectively part of it. When an individual belongs to a group, such as this mono-ethnic religious one, there is sharing of values, rituals, and attitudes that are experienced through belonging and enrich the participant's church-going experience. Formal participation in religious services enhances the participants' social identities in terms of this group and vice-versa.

The fact that behaviors are modified to fit the expected in this situation indicates a strong ethos created in the community: "We have created this Lebanese American identity or this American Maronite identity"(Aziz, third-generation). This community appears to have constructed the reality of what it means to be a Maronite, which reaches beyond the site's religious capabilities to the social, ethnic identity of what it means to be Lebanese. The findings show that the social identity created from membership and the roles held in the membership gives meaning to the participants' attendance practices, appearing to overshadow the spiritual offerings of being a Maronite. "The Church is a good means of ... as a means of reconnecting to my heritage and not strictly a spiritual experience" (Cecilia, fourth-generation). The participants' reflexive classification of being Lebanese and Maronite creates a sense of self that is discernible

and promotes the feeling of belonging that is a desirable distinctive social-psychological categorization. This study's findings show that religious behavior and activities are expressions of social groups rather than being purely sacred assignments of religious spirituality and guidance.

In contrast, the site has become a place where a complex social identity can be created, affirmed, and promoted. A majority of the attending participants focused their responses around the element of belongingness as tied to their loyalty at the church. These individuals were born into the faith and have grown up in the church alongside other Lebanese Americans. It is interpersonal relationships created over the generations that mark the relevance of the church in their lives. These individuals have created a social consciousness of whom they are based on their church membership. They have become reliant on the underlying shared ethnicity in their formal and informal social life in which the church is the primary holder. Aziz, an older adult, noted, "it's what we grew up in, every extracurricular activity we ever participated in was somehow Church connected" (Aziz, third generation).

The church is their community of fellow Lebanese who happen to share the same religious ideology. Belonging is formed by characteristics that are not exclusively indicative of religious practices; acceptance appears to be founded on a multitude of worldly characteristics that are not related to the mission of the church as a spiritual leader. Being part of the church is not only relevant at the individual level. However, it is also a collective phenomenon of family heritage, which supports the narrative of a participant's family origin and significance to the creation of the church site and its preservation. Set in place across the generations and inherited by successive generations, the view on what the norm is in the behavior and the ideology created by the original families is ingrained in the ethos of this faith-based community. Acceptance in

the social subgroups appears to be determined by characteristics such as family origin, ethnic heritage, generational positioning, and level of involvement of the individuals in the church community. These criteria are given more significant meaning when internalized and expressed by the members through religious affiliation. To be accepted into the folds of the church, there is an expectation by the congregants of similar behavior among the members due to their shared sacred and secular heritage and familial histories. The fact that a majority of the church members have the same ancestral heritage and shared family histories is compelling in the creation of the ethos of this community. This distinctive Maronite membership arose through chance (birth) and is reaffirmed in adulthood through a rational choice to be part of this community, and as such, is interwoven as the underlying criterion of membership. The data show the social character of family ties as a predominant characteristic element of subgroup membership, cementing the members' relationship to the faith and the family concurrently. All the attending participants were born and raised in the faith, surrounded by family members and close family friends throughout their lives, with their church-going experience on this site, building strong social bonds that give meaning to their choice to remain active in the church community and beyond in their personal lives. Many of the participants overtly refer to being descendants of the founding families as a given for placement in the larger group and the inherited positions in the community that goes with it at the individual level.

**Cultural tribalism.** The findings strongly support the construct of unanimity or tribalism as being one of the underlying social forces that have sustained this group over the generations. Although the term “tribalism” is not frequently used in sociocultural studies because of its negative connotation, its underlying elements are highly applicable to this study and its population. The term tribalism is often viewed as derogatory; however, it does not always have a

negative connotation when it reflects a bounded group's loyalty and allegiance for a constructive outcome. "It is an understanding when you are among the people who are Maronites that you all are part of the same cloth and community" (Cecilia, fourth generation). Tribalism refers to a group that is forced to stick together for survival as a unique cultural and religious entity by looking inward. Tribalism can be both positive and negative, depending on how it is examined and utilized.

***Tribalism as a positive unifying practice.*** The positive impact of tribalism is evident in the longevity of St. George Maronite Church because it has allowed the community to become active as a unified group that has looked inward for its strength and support. The establishment of the church offered immigrants a social support system to celebrate their faith as a newly arrived ethnic group trying to adapt to the American culture; this needs to look inward provided them with the sustenance needed during this time. These early immigrants came from a land that persecuted them for their different faith, and they brought with them this need to look inward for sanctuary. In addition to escaping religious persecution, they had to deal with the practices of a foreign faith while struggling to exist in America and follow the religious norm of American Catholicism. This maintenance of a foreign faith required the immigrants' determined effort to focus on the values and norms of their culture in order to ensure the survival of their valued faith practices in the American milieu. Although the threat of external forces has diminished due to societal acceptance of the successive generations and there is no longer a need to fight for recognition in society, evidence of the patterns of tribalism behavior remains embedded in the group dynamics. Lebanese Americans' sense of difference has been a positive uniting force and proven advantageous up to this point in the church's survival in America. This psychological trait to stick together for survival is ingrained and passed on to the next generations, even though

the latter no longer feels the outside threats of society. This learned survival through a tribal persona, while not necessarily generationally programmed, has been built on enough generations to be a substantial part of their cultural ancestry as Lebanese Americans and Maronite Catholics. The deliberate and inherent need to belong to this group has propagated the tribal identity that appears to be active among this group, whose members still view themselves as different and in need of protection from threats to the identity that they wish to maintain.

The feeling of solidarity currently remains a strong element in the church in San Antonio. Being with others who share the same heritage and are united by religion is a powerful way to identify with others in the church. Contrary to tribalism's element of turning against friends and social groups in support of tribal behavior, this does not appear to be part of this group's unity. Instead, it has supported relationships that complete the individuals' self-concept as their choice to identify with. For these individuals, the community's purpose is to provide a place for the continuation of the sacred ideology and folklore of a collection of families. It allows the transmission of an image that portrays what it is to be Maronite, as created by the first generations. It has supported the intense loyalty that individuals feel for the group to which they belong.

***Tribalism may also lead to exclusivity.*** However, supportive of this element is in creating solidarity; the group has tended to be exclusive in its views of belonging. Although not extreme in its outward demonstration of disliking other groups that are different, it does have an impact on the level of acceptance of others who are not part of the inner circle that dominates the groups formed on this site. It is apparent in the level of acceptance as expressed toward other Lebanese and Catholic institutions. This concept of solidarity is very apparent in the dialogues of the congregants on this site who perceive themselves as different from other Lebanese, other

Catholics, and even other Maronites. Those who do not fit in this socially constructed paradigm of what a Maronite feels disenfranchised and alienated from the inner circle of the community. Fellowship dictated by the congregation is extended to those who fit the image created by the church members over the generations. In contrast, those who do not fit this image are not as readily accepted. This inward thinking can be detrimental as the church looks to the future, as noted in the findings regarding the non-attending participants.

**Additional barriers to belonging.** The Maronite Church is revered to as the indigenous Church of Lebanon. The relationship with Lebanon is a spiritual one; although the Maronite See is in Lebanon, this does not mean that it is exclusive to the Lebanese people. The Maronite Church, as an entity of the Catholic Church, serves all who wish to follow its theological and liturgical traditions expression of the Catholic faith. All the participants, attending and non-attending, note the fact that the church members have created and endorsed the face of the Maronite in a manner that conforms to the ideal image of its prevailing members. With the creation of a collective identity of being Maronite on this site, supported by common ancestors and shared belief systems, there is a little movement toward recognizing the need for greater acceptance. Although not all Maronite participants are directly related, there is a strong sense of unity built on the familial interrelationships of the members, resulting in the sense of wariness of those who do not fit the created image. Although the members do have the authority to restrain participation at this religious institution, their actions are viewed as unwelcoming and off-putting. If an individual does not conform to the criteria of membership set in place by the church members, he/she feels excluded from the church's inner circle and is unable to experience the communal experience of attendance at this religious site. Feelings of alienation and disenfranchisement are noted by individuals who do not share in the ancestral histories or

conform to the ethos created from the folklore of most of the churchgoers. The feeling of not belonging interferes with their social identity and creates feelings of being the “other” in the equation of social group acceptance. As a result, for these non-attending individuals, participation in religious services is forbidding and unfulfilling due to social cliques and subgrouping. This exclusive behavior has had an impact on the attendance patterns of other Lebanese Americans. They have stated that they do not feel welcome in the church for “not being like the group members” based on the lukewarm reception by a few members of the congregation. These non-attendees state that they do not fit in the group because the two sides do not align in their belief systems regarding the community-created imagery of what it means to be Lebanese and Maronite. Rather than question their claim to a heritage that they know to be true for themselves and adapt the one promoted by the Church, they have chosen to be separate from the group that they could not identify with. In this manner, the underlying remnants of tribalism are disparaging. Among a group that lives in broader pluralistic society, tribalism has remained an active identity as a means of creating exclusivity and maintaining a sanctuary designed for a few, supported by the broader religious institution. It has narrowed the membership in this local church to meet the needs of the few, which diverges from the purpose of the Church as a worldwide religious institution.

Although these individuals are familiar with the church, no connection was made with the community when they attempted to attend it as adults. As noted in the data, these individuals are third- or fourth-generation Lebanese Americans and had experiences with the Maronite faith and church when they were growing up. The noted difference between this group and the congregants is the lack of shared familial origin and ties to the original families of the church and their descendants.

Not only is the promoted environment of exclusivity detrimental to the Lebanese Americans who might otherwise participate in the community, but it also has a far-reaching impact on the church's ability to be inclusive in serving all Catholics under its distinct liturgical teachings. One attending participant sums up this exclusivity when he acknowledges this lack of inclusion of non-familiar individuals:

It came up even last Sunday at Mass. A non-Lebanese parishioner who did not identify himself said that 'you guys have something special, except you are too close-knit; you never say hi to others,' which we know to be true. We all know this (laughs). (Aziz, third generation)

This cliquish atmosphere has created a barrier to attendance for many who might otherwise be part of the community. This perceived exclusivity created by the church members, who set the boundaries of acceptance, is believed by the individual who is not part of the inner circle to be subjective, obstructive, and deliberate. Implications of social identity development. This church serves as a network focused on the ethnic community, and participation in this ethnic church is a means of connecting to their heritage and their fellow Lebanese. This network is limited in other parts of their lives. Close association in this faith-based ethnic community, in turn, facilitates and encourages a positive ethnic identity through socialization. Social belonging is a strong influential element relating to church engagement. Through the similar culture of the church and its members, this strong bond is built, for the teachings of the Maronite rite align with the Lebanese social identity (Saade, 2012). The importance of religious identity is likely since it encompasses other parts of life.

This study shows alternative sustainability paths for ethnic churches in America when confronted with challenges associated with changing populations. The findings indicate that



attendance is not merely determined by formal religious practices or spiritual guidance offered by their church but a combination of the social activities and the group membership that it entails. Unlike other ethnic churches that adapt to mainstream society and thus lose their ethnic identity, this church relies heavily on the ethnic presence of the rite in maintaining a committed and loyal membership base. This is inconsistent with the previous ethnic-religious institution-based studies that promote adaptation in the face of extinction among subsequent generations; instead, it provides a unique perspective on the value of ethnic churches in preserving and promoting their ethnic identity among successive generations. Established by the immigrant population, this site has maintained its relevance in the lives of the subsequent generations without relinquishing its distinct ethnic sacred identity, which is esteemed by its congregants who seek a connection to their ancestral heritage.

Over the generations, these families' members have left their footprints in the community that has been carried on from generation to generation. It is their church and community; this consciousness has created a strong commitment to its continued growth and the permanence of the ethos, which is limited to their perspectives of what it means to be Maronite and Lebanese. Over the decades and through multiple generations, this group has created a narrative that supports their need to look within their inner circle for self-affirmation and self-promotion, creating a social atmosphere of exclusivity that bars those who do not conform to this manipulated ethos. The stated expectations for a member's behavior, as well as those of others within the group, mandate a level of behavior that is deemed acceptable by the church members and promotes the atmosphere of selectiveness and exclusivity that can be damaging at the operational level. I believe that all religious institutions should be inclusive and exclusive behaviors that promote homogeneity invites stagnation. This sharp uniform social force of

exclusivity that is the foundation of the membership within this community will negatively impact the growth of the church as a religious entity. This finding is valuable in demonstrating that what can make the church appealing to some is forbidding to others who might otherwise contribute to an achievable and sustainable diversity. Ideally, the church should not be segregated in a way that places barriers to others. Outreach to all individuals who wish to worship in this church should be the goal, and the need for open membership must be addressed if the church wishes to grow and flourish.

### **Believing: Maronite Rite's Identity Objective**

An additional emergent theme pulled from the data is the value of the cultural significance of the Maronite Church's identity among its followers in their ethnic identity formation. Religion is a "social-cultural system of designated behaviors and practices, or organizations, which relates humanity to spiritual elements" (Lackenby, 1974, p. 5). The church plays a critical insulated role in the life of the consecutive generations of Lebanese Americans living in San Antonio, as each participant speaks of its eminence in being a singular place for cultural and ethnic renewal that is not obtainable elsewhere in their lives. The findings suggest that this church is placed in the position of being an institution that exists to preserve its sacred heritage among the faithful—who live in a society that radically differs from where the faith was born—while maintaining its relevance as a gatekeeper of its legacy among a congregation that is no longer connected to the motherland. Being Maronite offers the attending participants a sense of self-affirmation as Lebanese Catholics in America. Maronite Catholicism encompasses a whole range of traditions and practices that give meaning and texture to the faith. The fact that the Maronite Church has a distinct and constant identity as an Eastern rite established in the mountains of Lebanon has given it great importance among this population that is still cognizant

of its ancestral heritage. The distinct liturgical presence reflects the culture from which it was created, flourished, and was maintained over numerous centuries. The retention of its fundamental religious identity that is practiced on this site is one of its most influential characteristics of sacred engagement for the participants.

The identity of this church, expressed in its sacred fundamentals, seems to have resonated among its members as being its most active reinforcing element as the ethnic identity provider.

The singing and chants in Arabic or Syriac ... there is nothing like the familiarity and comfort to coming back to where you feel you belong, and some days, the Church is the only thing that makes me feel Lebanese at all. (Joseph, third generation)

This formation of a religious community that relies on its ethnic identity is the most potent creation of reality among this population (Smith, 2002). It is an Eastern identity that has not been compromised in the cultural milieu of America. Its strict adherence to its Eastern divine essence is essential in maintaining its identity as a distinctive rite in the Western world, which is what gives its strength among this population. It is from the distinctive Maronite ritual practices that this community enacts its imagined groupness or oneness.

The study's findings demonstrate how the practice of the Maronite faith, for many Lebanese Americans, is more than just a means of spiritual growth but a unifying experience through the Eastern liturgy at both individual and group levels. Active communal participation in the liturgy offers the participants the opportunity to reconnect to their ancestral heritage at an ethereal level that deepens their individual and collective ethnicity. The distinctiveness of the rite—its ecumenical traditions, practices, and aesthetics—creates a higher level of connection between a congregant and his/her fellow Lebanese congregants. These distinct elements include liturgical language (Aramaic/Syriac), music (chants), liturgical vestments, and iconography. The use of Aramaic or Syriac is a marker of the group, which supports distinct membership and

contextual relevance for the members (Crystal, 2007; Japal & Coyle, 2012). Aziz (third generation) speaks of the close connection he feels toward the church members due to their shared faith: “I can say I still feel that connection with these people through the service itself, the liturgy itself.” Many of the older third-generation participants speak of the comfort they receive through attendance, derived from their familiarity with the distinctive liturgical presentation of the rite and nostalgic childhood memories of attendance. The noted significance of the Eastern-influenced liturgy allows individuals to connect to their personal histories in an ethereal manner that is not available in the Latin rite services. It is the continuum of the archaic faith practices that have been passed from generation to generation that has kept it relevant in these individuals’ lives and supports the meaningfulness of their involvement. Although the expression of the faith is appealing to this select congregation, the Eastern laden liturgical traditions present creates limitations in attracting a broader Catholic community.

For this group of third- and fourth-generation Lebanese Americans, the site is an all-encompassing cultural marker that allows the sacred and the secular celebration of their Lebanese heritage. The value place on affiliation at this church is constructed from its offering of culture-related markers that are relevant to the Lebanese and Lebanese Americans. Extending beyond the sacred elements rooted in the Lebanese culture, the church is the gatekeeper of the secular cultural preservation for the Lebanese. It is the focal point from which cultural markers preserved through numerous community-building social functions, such as Lebanese festivals and cultural events. This conceptual relevance of the duality of the church as a place for both secular cultural and sacred renewal speaks of the awareness about the creation of a strong dichotomy of the church role that binds these congregants in a relevant manner. The preservation of the church is based on its distinctiveness, which is a unifying force among this group that

gives it a greater sense of shared commonality. The Maronite rite identity is not limited to religious engagement; equally relevant is the duty of the church to be a center of the community in preserving the ethnicity of its members who seek affirmation and renewal.

This community's members feel a strong sense of pride in the ancestral heritage of this church as an entity in which they have claimed. It represents who they are and how they are unique members of the Universal Church and the Middle East. They do not desire to forget their religious beliefs in order to blend into the American culture, even though in all other areas of life, they have forgone their ancestral past other than in symbolic ways. In this way, the church is the place for preserving all other cultural markers and identifiers. The church's existence has allowed the coherence of heritage continuity. Not only is the liturgy an opportunity to experience cultural renewal, but many of the citywide Lebanese cultural events are church-sponsored, which permit all Lebanese Americans to participate in a way that is not determined by church attendance. As the sponsor of such events, the church is one of the organized cultural institutions that enable the continuation of the culture by incorporating language, food, dance, music, and other cultural markers that might otherwise be abandoned by the successive generations with assimilation. These cultural events provide opportunities for cultural renewal and celebration for both church-attending and non-attending participants of this study. This church presents a bounded situation that allows individuals to not only worship in the same manner as their ancestors, but it is also a place where they can gather and socialize with individuals who share a similar heritage and do so with the broader San Antonio population.

**Spiritual guidance through attendance.** A notable discovery that affects the future of the church is related to the topic of spirituality or spiritual guidance as being of diminutive importance in the engagement in this religious institution. The initial thought relating to

attendance was the expectation that the church-going experience would be focused on developing a deeper connection to God and spiritual guidance for the individual. Interestingly, the findings show that although the study was conducted on a church site, focusing on religious attendance practices, the reasons for attendance were not overtly tied to the religious or spiritual reverence customarily associated with church attendance patterns. One of the broader research inquiries of this study is related to the question of this population's religious attendance in the church as being a matter of faith or lifestyle. The findings show that although the site is a religious institution, the discussion on spiritual guidance as a reason for attendance is seldom mentioned, indicating that the secular reasons for participation overarch the sacred reasons for engagement. This study shows that although attendance is, by most definitions, a religious activity, the attendance patterns seem to relate more to the social and ethnic identity. The influential factors for engaging in religious behavior centered on the culture-relevant aesthetics of the liturgy as being the most meaningful in their experience. Although the definitive vision of the Maronite Church is to be a place of spiritual growth and guidance, the data point to the fact that spiritual guidance as a reason for attendance is not prioritized. The data suggest that it is the appreciation of the innate cultural essence of the rite that serves as a means of individual cultural renewal, which is demarcated from religious and spiritual renewal.

This is a thought-provoking outcome of the provided narratives. It is a noteworthy discovery with implications since the findings suggest that the Church's precarious position in America has morphed its purpose among the successive congregants, possibly marginalizing its core vision as solely a place of spiritual guidance. Although participants did not explicitly mention spirituality, it is through church attendance that the members find a higher meaning, which implies their openness to the Church's religious teachings and theology. If this is true, the

implications are profound in the sense that the Church may be required to address this issue with an increased emphasis on spirituality for its community.

The apparent lack of spirituality could also be attributed to the limited sharing experience between the participants and me. Although spiritual renewal is not mentioned in the narratives, it does not mean that it does not exist in a reimagined form or is not part of the church-going experience. The fact that spirituality is a personal and individual experience, and due to the limited time and casual environment of the interview, this level of sharing may not have been attainable, although it may exist. It is challenging to discuss spirituality, which is innately elusive and personal yet all-encompassing, making it difficult for many of the interviewees to conceptualize verbally (Tisdell, 2000). The fact that spirituality is not cited as a reason for attendance could be attributed to the elusiveness of the term, the inadequate means of describing the religious experience, or a misinterpretation of the notion of spirituality. This notable absence of the mention of this construct is a paradigm switch, and the implications require a rethinking of the purpose of religious institutions in the modern world, where their meaningfulness in society is no longer limited to worship. In this case, being meaningful extends beyond spirituality, encompassing social meaningfulness for the members. Attendance is the act of being one with others who share their heritage and lineage, united through the inviolability of the Church. Participation provides happiness, unity, solidarity, and kinship. This fellowship is what the members seek from their church-going experience, as much as the benefit of spiritual guidance bounded in the Maronite faith. The church is a place that offers a safe place to express their love for their heritage and family, creating a sanctuary for this group. The linkage to ethnic behavior that is provided by this religious institution is a more prominent means of influencing behavior than any specific spiritual guidance or experience offered by the church. To state that these

religious activities and behavior are crucial to spirituality is to claim that religious practices occupy a central place in the life of the individual. The older third-generation experiences the spiritual dimensions of religious involvement in this church, yet the younger fourth-generation focuses more on the social-cultural aspects offered by membership. This trend, where the younger members find spirituality in various places, does not limit their experience to organized religion. The spiritual experience of these individual congregants appears achievable in being a sense of the wholeness, interconnectedness, and meaningfulness found through solidarity with their fellow Lebanese. This spirituality provides a sense of wholeness that is not obtainable in other group memberships, and that promotes religious attendance. The ritualization of this spirituality is exhibited in the integration of religious ceremonial practices and interpersonal relationships.

**Religious identity of non-attending.** Whereas the attending participants have created a reality where the ethnic identity of the Church is interchangeable with their ethnicity, those who do not attend do not feel this way. Although the attendees find meaning in their church-going experience for ethnic renewal, the non-attendees do not need the active church-going experience for ethnic maintenance in the non-attending participant. Ethnic consciousness for these participants is not dependent on the participation of the Maronite faith. The demographic questionnaire demonstrates that both groups are equally aware of their ethnic heritage and appreciate the role of the church as the means of ethnic affirmation and maintenance for the Lebanese population. The fact that the non-attendees are not engaged in the church is neither a de-Arabization of these individuals nor their desire for the rite to de-Arabize; instead, engagement at this faith-based community is not necessary for their process of establishing their ethnic identity. Being confident in their identity without the need for external reassurance or



renewal is a satisfactory state of these individuals who wish to practice their Catholicism under the Latin rite while identifying as Lebanese. These individuals are fully aware and accepting of their Lebanese heritage and have delineated their ethnic identity from their religious identity.

**Implications on the Maronite Church identity.** Although the St. George Maronite Church in San Antonio is predominantly comprised of Lebanese congregants, the Maronite rite is part of the Universal Catholic Church and, as such, is open to all Catholics, regardless of ethnicity. As crucial as the Lebanese culture and traditions are to the Lebanese identity formation, the church members need to keep in mind that the Lebanese culture and that of the Maronite Church are distinct from each other and not dependent on the Lebanese population alone. The Maronite is anyone who practices the faith embodied by the rite; it is inclusive of all Catholics wishing to follow its sacred heritage in the manner dictated by the Church. The Church's relationship to Lebanon remains a spiritual one, and its purpose is to provide spiritual guidance and defend the Catholic faith under its theological teachings. Retaining its distinct liturgical essence is essential for its identity and sustains the faith and spirituality found within the rite. Since the inception of this Eastern rite in the fourth century, the Maronite Church has made minimal measurable alterations in its necessary infrastructure or divine essence to appeal to the temporal needs of the diaspora. In fact, what is distinct about this rite, established in the mountainous regions of Lebanon 16 centuries ago, is the retention of its definable identity as an Eastern rite, even during its worldwide expansion.

This rite has remained true to its ecclesial origin and has retained its cultural identity while serving a global congregation. It is this strong cultural essence that has made it relevant among the Lebanese diaspora; however, its rigidity raises a severe issue in terms of appealing to a more diverse congregation of non-Lebanese and Latin-rite Catholics. Although St. George

Maronite Church is open to all Catholics, the distinctiveness of the liturgy and the vernacular limits its general appeal to the larger San Antonio church-going population. The misconception of the Maronite Church is designated for the Lebanese will change through outreach to and education of the broader San Antonio Catholic community. Although this action might increase awareness of the church, whether it actually will promote growth through a more diverse population is questionable. This church has been a part of the San Antonio Catholic backdrop for nearly 100 years, and the population has remained predominantly Lebanese. Awareness of this religious rite and actual commitment to this way of practicing Catholicism is not absolute.

Although the successive generations have successfully adopted the American cultural norms, the trajectory of this church has remained the same, staying ethnic in its presentation and practices. The Maronite rite has maintained its identity, even in different cultural milieus where its followers live. Unlike many ethnic churches with a noted dilution of their identity as a means of remaining relevant among subsequent populations, this church has been able to remain ethnic in its presentation, while retaining a vibrant population of subsequent generations. This study's findings strongly suggest that it is this retention of ethnic identity at the institutional level that allows the construction of meaning for these individuals who attend the church. The data gathered from this study of Maronites in San Antonio contradict the notion that institutional adaptation is necessary for survival. Instead, the findings suggest that dilution of the ethnic essence would have the opposite effect on the loyalty of the congregation, resulting in a loss of membership among the Lebanese American population. The narrative grounded in the findings is the fact that the distinctively Eastern ethnic essence of this rite has given viability to this church across the generations and that if there is adaptation or Americanization of the church, it would have little attraction for its current population. The bound between the sacred and secular culture

of the Lebanese participants is seen as inseparable: “It just cannot be a Maronite Church without the Lebanese culture” (Malik, fourth-generation). These attending participants cannot conceive the value of the church without the strong cultural essence found within its liturgical traditions and practices rooted in their own heritage.

Herberg (1973) theorizes that by the third generation, the individual fully assimilates and begins to show interest in religion from a thoroughly Americanized perspective, adapting to the American religious patterns of behavior, norms, and practices. The American perspective allows a new image of religion, no longer perceived as “foreign” but “American”—based on the role that American religious institutions play in the American culture. The church no longer offers an all-encompassing social and psychological retreat for the individuals. However, it is a place for communal worship that has no negative impact on their assimilation process. This concept of the role of religious institutions among subsequent generations is countered in this study. The findings point to the fact that this faith-based community continues to hold relevance in many areas of life and extends beyond the normative cultural role of a church in America, with no regression in its assimilation process. This church has been able to preserve its importance in the lives of Lebanese Americans for many generations because it is an all-encompassing bounded institution, being a place for worship, social gathering, familial elevation, and cultural renewal. In addition to the fact that the church’s role has remained relatively unchanged over the generations, there is also the fact that being able to retain its sacred integrity and maintain its relevance among the subsequent generations, without loss of importance, relates to the issue of future sustainability. A study focusing on the life cycle of ethnic churches (Mullins, 1987) suggested that the two paths for ethnic churches in America are adaptation or extinction; this study has offered a third alternative path for such churches seeking to remain relevant. Ethnic

churches can retain their sacred integrity and appeal to the subsequent generations as long as there is a continued need for ethnic maintenance among that population.

However, because St. George Maronite Church appeals to a specific population due to its retention of this cultural heritage rooted in the liturgy, change might result in a loss of the Lebanese American Catholics that have been loyal for so many decades. Narratives support this notion of the loss of membership if the church would move toward Americanization, including the abandonment of its distinct Lebanese culture rooted in the liturgy. There are many Latin-rite churches throughout the city of San Antonio, but this church captures its audience due to its distinctive liturgical presentation. For this reason, it is advantageous to the Lebanese American community at large to preserve its unique identity when looking at sustainability. It is not guaranteed that the adaptation of its divine essence will result in growth as it becomes integrated into the American Catholic norm. The data show a high possibility that it would result in the loss of many of its current congregants. They rely on the Maronite identity as an essential element of their ethnic identity development. The participants are adamant in their views relating to adaptation, stating that if this church would move toward Americanization, it would be an affront to the church identity and would mean the fading of their own identity. An underlying sentiment is that if the cultural component were absent, there would be a strong likelihood that the experience would be altered significantly to the point of possible abandonment of this church site. Omar (fourth generation) states that change would result in diluting the church to the point of being tenuous, “as opposed to just something else that exists as part of the American society. If you do not have the cultural component, it would just be another Catholic institution.”

Interestingly, even the non-attending participants feel that moving away from the church's cultural essence would be a move in the wrong direction when looking at being more sustainable. According to Cecilia (fourth generation), a non-attending participant,

everyone who does not go has their reason, and the church does not need to focus on those who do not go. However, rather, they need to continue to focus on those who go and continue to serve the needs of these people who are committed to the Maronite rite.

Historically, the Lebanese group embodies a culture where religious identity is a primary defining factor. This ethnoreligious classification remains part of the Lebanese American consciousness. Liturgical distinctiveness, commitment to sacred culture, and affinity to the ethnicity of religious practices represent different aspects of self-identification that support the maintenance of the church without adaptation.

### **Becoming: Elements of Internal/External Process of Adaptation**

Assimilation is a process that will differ based on race, ethnicity and religion. Depending on these variables, it may be a smooth linear process for some, while for others, it may be slowed by xenophobia, ethnocentrism, and religious bias.

-Milton Gordon (1961)

The last significant emergent theme from the collected data is centered on the construct of assimilation and the way it is expressed through the behaviors of the participants. Assimilation

is a process that all immigrant groups experience, that is, the inevitable absorption and integration of their cultures into the wider host society or culture. With the immigration of various ethnic groups, issues of faith, identity, and institution-building are critical in the communities seeking to establish themselves as part of American society. The immigrant groups have a strong determination to fit in the cultural milieu of American society, with the need for institutions built on shared experiences and convictions diminishing over the generations (Herberg, 1973). In the classic definition of assimilation, Gordon (1961) described ethnicity as a social-psychological sense of peoplehood stemming from history. He tended to foster relationships and memberships in specific groups. Generationally, new immigrants and their children choose to participate in activities that make their ethnic identification clear, but as this involvement decreases through subsequent generations, identification becomes more ambiguous (Gordon, 1961). According to the traditional assimilation theory, during this process, immigrants and their offspring move toward a state of ethnic neutrality or triviality as they incorporate themselves into the dominant group. With each new generation, the struggle to blend into the American culture becomes less of an issue, and as a natural occurrence, the need for ethnic communities becomes less critical. Although there are many mono-ethnic churches throughout the nation, their immediate purpose is limited to providing an easily identifiable situation that is needed in the lives of the immigrants during their adaptation to American society. The ethnic church may have originated as a transitional cultural institution; however, through the commitment of its members over the generations, it has been able to retain its relevance among the subsequent generations.

**Levels of assimilation among successive generations.** The findings show that all participants in this case study appear to have gained entry into the relevant social institutions of

the host society, and their continued ethnic identification has not hindered their opportunities in education, income, intermarriage, and occupations. They have achieved high socio-economic status, have earned advanced degrees, are geographically dispersed across the city, and many have intermarried into other cultures successfully. Their acceptance of the American culture and, in return, acceptance by society support Gordon's theory of structural or linear assimilation (Gordon, 1961). The findings show that the younger fourth-generation participants differ in their level of understanding of their ethnic identity as a defining part of who they are, attaching sentimentality and wistfulness to the notion of ethnicity. This grasping for superficial symbols of their ethnicity is a reliable indicator of the impact of continued assimilation. The participation level at the Maronite Church focuses on the symbolic expression of the culture, such as dance, food, and music that reinforces their image of what it means to be Lebanese. This perception of the role of the church suggests symbolic ethnicity that does not conflict with the traditionally accepted theory of linear assimilation but explains this phenomenon as a continuation of previous generations' behavior. In other words, even though by the third generation, acculturation and assimilation have occurred for most of them, ethnic ties are still present, and the proceeding generations continue to perceive themselves as ethnic, whether they define ethnicity in terms of sacred or secular behavior (Gans, 1979). These generations are less concerned about maintaining their religious, ethnic identity than about voluntarily and deliberately maintaining their secular, ethnic identity and feelings of belonging to a group that symbolizes ethnicity.

An area of interest that I did not expect when the study began was that both groups (attendees and non-attendees) appeared to be at the same stage of assimilation. Based on the constructs of assimilation theories, I assumed before the data collection that non-attendance was

the result of some individuals being more assimilated and having abandoned their ethnic identity rapidly, in comparison to the attending participants, due to this latter group's propensity to retain membership in the ethnic church. I presumed that those who did not attend the Maronite Church were further along in their assimilation process and abandonment of ethnic identity. The findings show that this is not the case; instead, each group demonstrates strong levels of assimilation and retention of ethnic identity, independent of religious membership. This noted variance is evident in how the non-attending and attending acknowledge their identity, individually (non-attendees) and collectively (attendees).

**Modified assimilation among the subsequent generations.** While this group of Lebanese descendants has fully embraced the American culture, it is the conscious coherence of the Lebanese sacred and secular heritage that allows the group's members to fully affirm who they are in this context of American society and within the Catholic Church. St. George Maronite Church is a placeholder on which they not only rely on religiousness but, even more importantly, for interpersonal relationships and affirmation of their ethnic self while successfully integrating within the American social structures. Being Maronite constructs the foundation for the individual ethnic self, and the continuation of the worship based on the ancestral faith has not altered or impaired their lives outside this religious practice. Because it does not interfere with their assimilation progress, they can freely exercise their choice to remain connected to their ancestral faith. This ability to thrive as both Maronites and Americans means that the compartmentalization of their lives offers them the option of being true to themselves without fear of regression or prejudice. This group has successfully compartmentalized their lives as Americans to include ethnic renewal through religious practices. It is through the church experience that this group appears to have managed to commit to both cultures concurrently



without loss of their status as American Catholics. Observance of their ancestral religious practices reaffirms their ethnic identity during Sundays. However, they can legitimately return to their Americanized lives during the rest of the week without regression in status. This shows that rather than being only partially assimilated due to the retention of their ancestral ethnic religion, they have successfully assimilated with the luxury of a strong ethnic identity.

This reveals that engagement in the ethnic church atmosphere is not an indicator of the participants' level of assimilation. The reason is that individuals who do not rely on religious participation as a means of constructing identity are equally assimilated, and the personal choice to be non-members of the faith-based community is based on contextual social issues rather than the result of their abandonment of ethnic or religious identity. In summary, it could be stated that this group has successfully created a hybrid culture that allows them the freedom to be thoroughly American yet identify strongly as Lebanese, as well as to be normative under the American Catholic Church in their religious patterns but within the distinctive faith of the Maronite rite. They have navigated their lives as the subsequent generations of Middle Eastern immigrants to be accepted in society and its religious institutions while staying true to their ancestral heritage.

**Implications of modified assimilation.** The Lebanese immigrant population is known to have adapted to American life rapidly (Kayyalli, 2006). Assimilation trends have been quick, with the host society's acceptance of the second-generation Lebanese Americans (Orfalea, 2006). Although assimilation among most groups is assumed to be completed by the third generation, evidence of modified assimilation is shown in this study as it relates to the adherence to a strong ethnic identity among the third- and fourth-generation Lebanese American participants. Affiliation to this ethnic church has allowed the individuals to compartmentalize the

ethnic aspects of their lives that are incorporated into and organized in this religious institution for straightforward interpretation. The participants have completed structural assimilation and are Americanized in their appearance and attitudes, while retaining many distinguishing characteristics, such as food, family structural values, language, and religious behavior (Suleiman, 1999). This group's members have created a hybrid culture that allows them to continue identifying themselves as both Lebanese and Americans and both Maronites and Catholics. The vessel that has allowed this continued affirmation of their ethnic self with an abundance of cultural markers is embedded in the Maronite Church located in the city of San Antonio.

Not only does religious attendance allow cultural exposure, but equally valuable is the availability of culturally relevant markers that are easily obtainable through their Maronite Church community's cultural events. These place markers that are incorporated into their religious institution enable the Lebanese in America to selectively alter their assimilation process without interruption in all other areas of life (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). This ability to thrive in the American culture while retaining a distinctive ethnic identity is unusual but not unheard of. Lazerwitz and Rowitz's (1974) study, states that by the third generation, the ethnic church serves as a means of revisiting its members' inherited religious faith to counter the "emotionally cold, urban-industrial complex society" presented as a result of assimilation. However, this three-generation hypothesis suggests that the focus on this generational behavior entails the return to the ethnic church, whereas in the group in the present case study, it has been a strong continuity in attendance over the generations; there has never been an abandonment of the ethnic church, only to return by the third generation.

The fact that some members have chosen to remain faithful to their ancestral faith does not delineate the impact of the assimilation process that has occurred over the generations. Instead, it demonstrates the individuals' ability to determine the areas where the abandonment of their ethnic identity fits in their lives. As observed in the findings relating to Americanization, the levels of assimilation do not vary between the two groups, and the results do not support the notion that one group is more assimilated than the other based on religious practices. Those who attend the Maronite Church are equally absorbed into the American culture as those who have chosen not to attend it. This finding suggests that attendance in a mono-ethnic church does not correlate with the stages of assimilation that these individuals have completed. Instead, it demonstrates that the individuals who choose to attend the church have made the conscious effort to retain their ethnic identity as Lebanese Americans, without fear of losing their status in society, and can navigate their assimilation in a manner that is aligned with their image as Americans. Although this population's members have assimilated into the American cultural norms and mores that are appropriate for their generational situation, they have retained a part of their ethnicity that is meaningful for them due to the active psychological, religious, and social rewards that it provides. In effect, their assimilation has made their ancestral religious practices and traditions more relevant to their lives because, over the generations, it has remained one of the last connections to their past, which they actively treasure and revere as Americans. Such identification that is assigned by the individuals takes on more meaning for them, who do not feel the declining sense of their heritage once assimilated.

Although the filled church pews are members who are highly committed to the Maronite faith, there is the prospect that the church will face similar challenges encountered by all ethnic churches in attempting to remain relevant, with the changing populations affected by ongoing

assimilation. Gordon (1961) indicates in his works that among successive generations, the eventual elimination of all cultural and ethnic identity markers would be absorbed into the broader dominant culture, resulting in the disappearance of ethnic group identity. It is the assumption that continued acclimatization and adaptation to an American identity will have an impact on future generations and that this will inevitably influence the church's role in San Antonio.

A secondary objective in examining the influencing factors that support engagement in the Maronite Church is to identify elements of weaknesses and strengths, intending to address sustainability issues related to the ethnic church in San Antonio. This study highlights the importance of the church as a place of worship, ethnic stability, and revitalization, as well as a center of social interaction among Lebanese Americans living in San Antonio. The church's presence allows a continuance of the Lebanese ethnic identity through its liturgical elements throughout the generations, offsetting the influences of assimilation among this Lebanese American population. The sustainable balance between the two identities (American and Lebanese) has been allowed to flourish due to the clannish community's unwavering commitment to retaining their ancestral heritage through their worship practices. Besides its religious importance, the church has retained continued significance of ethnic affirmation in presenting a bounded situation that encompasses all the cultural markers relevant to this population. The church's resistance to Americanization is not only a statement of its sacred orthodoxy, but it is an equally important statement of its members' tenacity to remain connected to their ancestral heritage throughout the generations as a group. There is a concerted intent that while adapting to the host society in most ways, the need to retain their ethnic identity is valued. As a result, when examining sustainability issues related to changing populations, the

maintenance of these influences needs to be adapted to meet the needs of future congregants in order to offset the impact of assimilation.

Change does not imply a change in the Maronite identity for a broader population that is more representative of the San Antonio Catholic population per se; instead, it would entail changes that would make the church more aligned with the Americanized Lebanese population. As with all religious institutions, attracting younger congregants poses a challenge, and this church is not immune to this crisis. In the case of ethnic identity, an affirmation may not be a priority for future generations; the church will still manage to grow, building on its unique ability to develop a sense of belonging. In developing its social identity, the church needs to prioritize opportunities to serve, connect, and grow as a new community with new needs. In tackling change, the objective is to maintain the vision of the Maronite Church, while addressing the needs of both current and future populations. The ability to appeal to the needs of the broader population of Lebanese Americans is also possible, with proper attention paid to the institution's and the congregation's capacity to meet their needs as a religious entity. The key to long-term sustainability requires working cooperatively with all involved in the preservation of the church as a distinctive religious institution in San Antonio.

### **Contextual and Affective Stimuli Model**

This study ties in with the ethnic identity development and maintenance of the members at various levels of meaning, the social-psychological reality, their connection to the Maronite identity, and the impact of assimilation on the church, the groups, and the individuals. As the data demonstrates, there is the overarching core theme of ethnic identity that influences and motivates Maronite's engagement. This theme of ethnic identity characteristics is central to the influences that engage the members and promote the mission of the church. This allegiance is

understood as this distinct rite having arrived with the immigrants who desired to worship in a manner that was appropriate for their cultural background. The love of the church has sustained it over the generations, and the connection between the culture of the church and the culture of its members is the most identifiable element that binds this faith-based community. This core theme is grounded in all emergent themes, radiating to and guiding all meaning-making activities and behaviors exhibited by the participants of this study in one way or another. This ethnic construct influences each theme and subtheme in a primordial contextual manner.

The ethnic identity core elements that apply to each of the three emergent themes are specific to the themes, and the affective aspect of each theme demonstrated at each level, with the accumulation of emotions that guide the individuals' behaviors. The valence (intrinsic attractiveness or aversion to a situation or experience) resonates with the individuals, as reflected intrinsically in their behaviors, and the overall positive valence is meaning making. For the non-attendees, their responses often result in an adverse or negative valence, as reflected in the social belonging aspect associated with community behavior. This criterion of negative valence influences the individuals' level of engagement.

Figure 9 illustrates the relationship between ethnic characteristics and themes to show the varied elements arrived at through the data and how the factor of the ethnic characteristics influences the themes that resonate with the participants, as demonstrated in their behaviors.

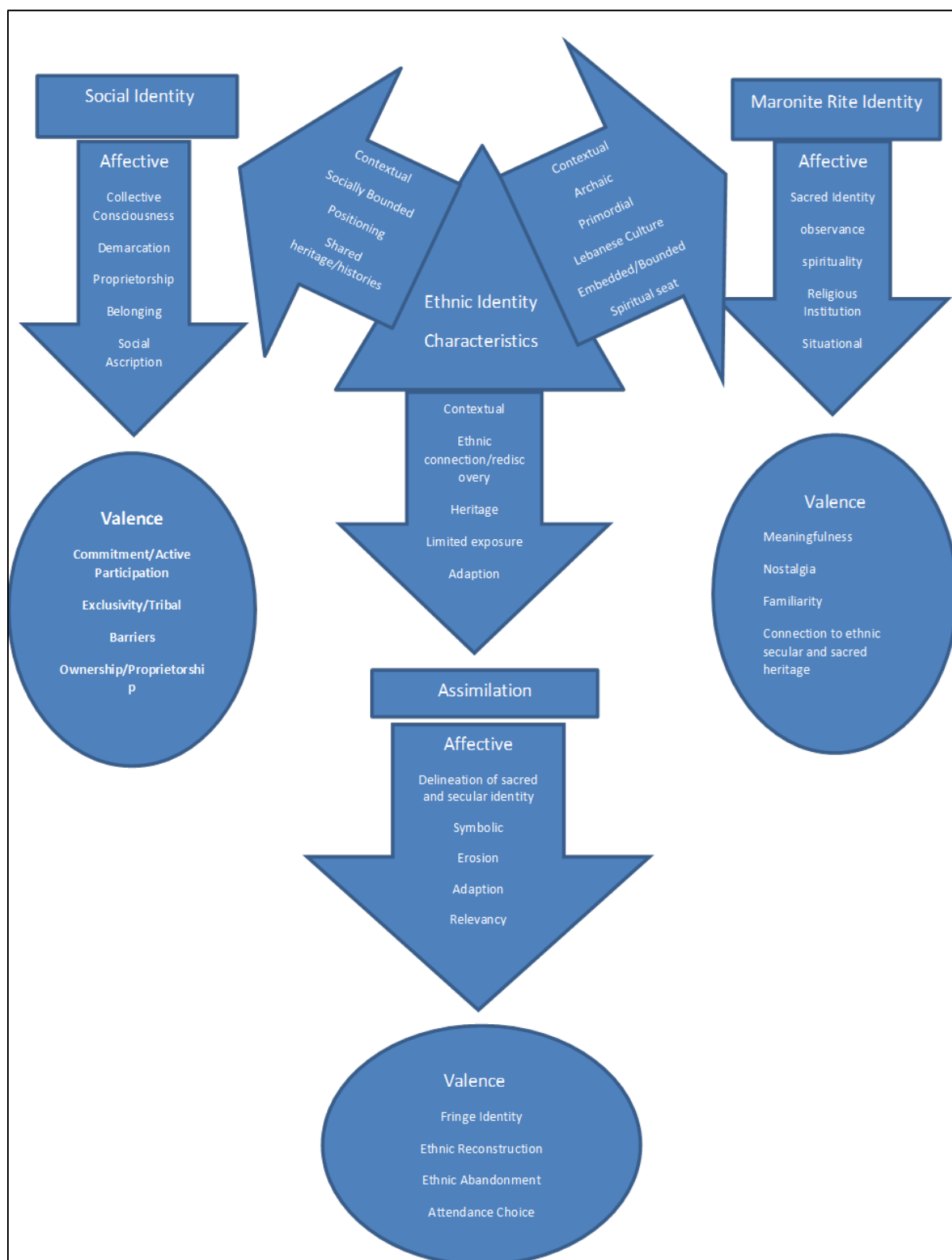


Figure 9. Contextual and affective stimuli process.

## Summary of Findings

The Maronite Church is a multidimensional cultural marker, bridging the East and the West through its sacred practices. The strong cultural overtones in this rite strengthen the bond between religious behavior and social behavior, creating a heightened sense of ethnic self through attendance practices and affiliation to the community. Ethnic identification as a member of one's religious group creates a stronger sense of self, which leads to certain intergroup and intragroup behaviors and attitudes that have been propagated over the generations and have become the accepted norms. The relationship between the Maronite faith and the ethnic identity of Lebanese Americans creates authenticity and gives value to formal religious participation and social interaction. Frequent religious formal involvement would be associated with a stronger religious and social identity. More frequent manifestations of a sacred formal relationship would be related to a closer identification as a member of one's religious group. In turn, this aspect of identity would account for higher levels of cultural awareness through shared heritage.

The most noted sentiment found in the data is the overwhelming concept of social belonging based on shared heritage. For many of the participants, being part of the Maronite community allows them to "be themselves" when surrounded by fellow Lebanese Americans, and this shared heritage among the congregants and in the liturgy strengthens their identity. All participants were born into the faith. As such, the ceremonial role of the church and its practices and traditions solidify the sense of security and familiarity that has been handed down to the generations of Lebanese Americans in San Antonio. Belonging to the church and celebrating their ancestral heritage as a group is a means of defining who they are as individuals and as a collective. Putting together ethnicity and religion, entities that are both cultural appears to be a



strong basis for meaning construction and cohesion for these participants and allows them to realize their full personal potential as Lebanese Americans.

## **Chapter VII: Sustainability Discussion and Recommendations**

### **Sustainability as Related to the Maronite Church**

The value of this religious institution for the study's population is multifaceted in that it provides spiritual guidance for its members that resonate at a deeper level because of its cultural significance to the congregants. It is in the fact that the sacred traditions and practices give meaning to their internal self-identification as Lebanese in America has kept the Maronite Church relevant over the generations. This ethnic church is a safe place to express and affirm their ethnic self in a group of similar people whom all feel a connection to their ancestral heritage as Americans. The study's findings do not align with previous studies relating to the relationship between successive assimilated generations and mono-ethnic churches in America. This study's findings offer a different perspective on the topic and are of interest to the site when addressing issues that might arise among an ever-changing population.

Although the current congregation's members fully embrace their ethnic self, as acknowledged through their attendance, the impact of assimilation among future generations is relevant among a population that will theoretically continue to move away from and abandon their ethnic identity. Knowing why these individuals attend is the first step of the process; the next step involves how these findings are utilized in conceptualizing a plan to address the challenges that all ethnic churches face—the loss of relevance. The following section applies these findings to the topic of sustainability in order to answer the question of how this understanding of the participants' activities and behaviors affects the church's ability to remain a viable part of the community currently and to address the challenges that arise with the changing population and the environmental influences when serving its members and maintaining its relevance as a distinctly ethnic church in the cultural milieu of America. Answering the question

of what influences allow successive generations' continued engagement in the Maronite Church offers insight on the follow-up question relating to sustainability issues that this church faces with the changing population.

All institutions are organic, changing, and adapting to reflect the environment they serve. Knowing the current congregation's needs provide the required knowledge to maintain its current level of membership while addressing the challenges of the future. Currently, the Maronite Church is stable due to the predominantly committed population of third- and fourth-generation congregants. When examining the topic of sustainability, the focus should remain on the capacity of the church to remain primarily a place for spiritual guidance and renewal. As a religious institution, the Maronite Church has the primary objective of providing a place for people to come and worship in a manner that follows the ecclesial traditions of the rite. The Maronite rite has an institutional obligation to remain true to its unique liturgical essence under the governance of the rite while addressing the social changes that might have an impact on this institution's ability to continue its purpose and not be merely a secular institution of cultural renewal.

Sustainability is not always about addressing what might be considered on the verge of being lost; it could also involve finding a nearly ideal existence that has always been there but hidden. Since the population's needs might be different in the future, to offset the impact of change, it is advisable to look inward when seeking out ways to assure its continuance. Meeting the challenges that face this ethnic church does not mean changing what it is as a distinct religious institution but realizing the value of its existence in a culturally different environment. The Maronite Church has expanded to meet the needs of its members scattered across different continents with immigration. Although immigration has slowed, the Church has retained its

global relevance among the successive generations that desire the continual presence of this rite in their lives, long after the cultural influences of Lebanon are no longer part of their everyday lives. This group continues to feel the hunger to connect to its ancestral heritage, and the Church provides the nourishment. Embracing what the Church is and who its members are is how the Church can withstand the onslaught of changes and sustain itself as it navigates the future. Sustainability relies on a concerted effort of the religious institution and its members to ensure its continued relevance as an Eastern rite in a pluralistic society.

**Belonging: Social identity and sustainability.** The Lebanese immigrants initially established this church. They sought a place where Lebanese Maronite's could worship as a community in a manner that was appropriate for their cultural understanding of Catholicism. An unspoken classification created by the church community is that this church was established by the Lebanese for the Lebanese. This sentiment can be detrimental to the capacity of the church and have a negative impact on its growth. This results in the exclusivity created by a selective population that has built an invisible barrier to those who do not conform to the image created by this church's members. All participants, including non-attendees, were born into the faith, yet some feel a definite disconnection to the faith, based on the reception that they experience from the community. The topic of sustainability is a relevant issue that should be discussed. The post-interview sustainability survey asked the respondents what the church could do when looking toward the future; many of them answered that there was a need for increased community building among the church community and the broader San Antonio community. This emphasis on community building demonstrates the desire for community enhancement among the individuals in order to have an increased sense of fellowship among the broader population. The irony is that most respondents are those who have created this atmosphere of exclusivity, and this

move would result in a loss of leverage within the group. It is a natural phenomenon to create a community with shared similarities and to be with people like oneself. Nevertheless, this church's mission is to provide a place of worship that is open to all Catholics, and it is the close-knit community that has barred this in its behaviors. Not only are there barriers to Lebanese Americans, but these also extend to other populations that most likely do not feel welcomed due to the surface determinants of what it means to be part of this church.

**Believing: Religious identity and sustainability.** In its worldwide expansion, the rite has made little adaptation to the host society's norms and mores, and it is unlikely that any further adaptive moves will occur without causing a dilution of the sacred roots defining the rite. Social scientists (Beyers, 2012; Chin, 2019; Herberg, 1973; Hirschman, 2004) recognize that religion contributes to a sense of identity and assumes the role of the protector of ethnic identity, and this work supports this construct. The Maronite Church in San Antonio offers a stable social space within the teachings and the practices of the church; it has been a consistent space where the successive generations can construct their own ethnic-religious identities through membership. This creation of identity within the boundaries of the church is collectively shared among other congregants with similar heritage and familial origins. Many of the participants state that any further adaptation or standardization to the American Catholic culture would push them away from the church.

When discussing adaptation among ethnic churches, the most prominent act would be the alteration of the liturgical language to be more meaningful to the changing population. The Maronite rite has adapted its liturgical language to the needs of the English-speaking population; however, further adaptation in its distinct ecumenical traditions and practices would alter the fundamental essence of the rite. While further adaptation in its ceremonial actions and liturgical

vernacular might attract a broader population of Catholics, the counter-effect would be the loss of its religious, loyal Lebanese community. As such, maintaining and promoting the unique Lebanese ethnic traditions would encourage and support individual identity affirmation and group solidarity, which would theoretically result in continued loyalty. Additionally, remaining distinct in its theological and ecumenical essence would allow this church to secure a place in the competitive religious sphere as an alternative to the standardized Catholic churches in San Antonio.

**Becoming: Assimilation and sustainability.** “To understand the heart and mind of a person, look not at what he has already achieved, but at what he aspires to” (Kahlil Gibran, 1921).

Studying this church reveals the evidence of great love for and secures the attachment to the faith-based community, resulting in achieved sustainability over many generations. The meaning-making ability of this church is highly regarded and appreciated by its current members; as a result, they hope and desire that the church will continue to hold a place in the hearts of their children and future generations. Each member has built a high level of commitment based on the desire that the church will continue to thrive and be there for the future generations who may wish to be part of this community. It is shortsighted to only look at the relevance of the church for its members as an indicator of success. Instead, this church can continue its same level of service for future generations that will mark its real success as it faces the challenges of the changing population and social climate. Because of the multidimensional nature of organizational culture, it is difficult to prescribe a single course of action to attain sustainable operations. The immediate goal is to explore how the church can continue to offer the changing population a sense of its unifying traditions that will create the same level of loyalty

and solidarity that has allowed this site to flourish over these past nine decades. When exploring the issues of sustainability, utilizing the collected data, it is prudent for this church and its members to focus on moving forward in a manner that is comfortable for all involved. The goals and the functions of sustainability programs vary from organization to organization because such programs are designed to meet the specific needs of their respective organizations. Sustainability awareness addresses the complexity of change that will have an impact on an institution and creates a pathway that will offset any adverse effect of such change (that might otherwise diminish the importance of the institution) and allow its continued growth. Sustainability is achievable by facilitating exchange relations and binding communities, while continually focusing on their collective desire; in this way, it becomes a reflection of each group's identity.

Aspiring to be present in the future as a distinct church against the American cultural backdrop is a challenge that the group in this case study can hurdle, with the guidance of the church leaders and community involvement, as they advance to the next chapter of its institutional life. This can be the continued story of this church, to stay faithful to itself and adapt to fit the changing needs of those being served. Implementing the ideas and perceptions relating to attendance practices discovered in this work into action, a capacity framework would be helpful. To state that there is a need for change without understanding its multidimensional layers would be haphazard and ineffective. In examining the possible areas of adaptation based on the sustainability survey responses, it is evident that the current congregation understands the need for the continued Lebanese identity of the rite, the need to emphasize this unique rite and educate its members, as well as to engage and draw on its community and the broader community where it exists to gain acceptance and strength for its continuation.

**Implications of sustainability on the Maronite Church.** For many generations, this church has been able to sustain itself as a vibrant faith-based community due to the loyalty of many of the descendants of these early immigrant founding families. This study adds to the understanding of the third- and fourth-generation ethnic identity maintenance as related to religious practices and membership at a faith-based community. Whereas most of the literature dealing with ethnicity and religion focuses on this interrelationship among the immigrant population and their children, this study is able to extend beyond the early generations and examines the role of the church among the subsequent generations. Based on the findings, abandonment of ethnic identity has not declined linearly among this population; instead, its ethnic identity has been retained through social and religious grouping, long after an individual has experienced structural assimilation. Among successive generations, their continued affiliation to this ethnic church is not a reliable indicator of delayed assimilation but the evidence that assimilation can be modified to fit the individual's expression of self in the larger society. This retention neither hinders the assimilation process nor threatens the acceptance into American society.

This loyalty among the third and the fourth generations has allowed this site to flourish in San Antonio; however, there is the need to reflect on the impact of assimilation on future generations. Trends, such as population and demographic changes, can pose a significant challenge to the church as a place for ethnic affirmation through membership among a population that no longer identifies with its ancestral sacred or secular heritage. The findings show that sustainability concerns are beginning to surface with the acknowledgment of the changing perspectives on the need for ethnic identification and affirmation through attendance among the next generations. Many of the third-generation, lifelong members of the church



mention that their children are no longer members of the church and have either abandoned the Catholic faith or have begun attending the Latin-rite services. This change in attendance patterns suggests the continuation of the assimilation process.

Issues of continued absorption among the younger generation should be reflected on when examining the life cycle of this ethnic church. The interviews with the younger population indicate that most fourth-generation categorizations, their noted benefits of church membership, and their religious service attendance are predominantly based on the social aspects resulting from membership and the capacity of the church as an avenue to express ethnic awareness. The social aspect of churchgoing appears to be prioritized by this population, suggesting the marginalization and transformation of purpose to become a mere secular institution of culture rather than a sacred institution of spiritual guidance. The absence of self-affirmation through spiritual guidance can be attributed to the next generation's full assimilation as Americans, with the church being merely a symbolic marker of their heritage.

As the future generations will likely continue their assimilation process, it is natural to predict that most will probably abandon their ancestral ethnic identity completely. When assimilation is complete without continued modifications, the current relevance of the Maronite Church among this generation might prove to be irrelevant in the future generations. Sustainability entails the ability to exist continually, and this is the challenge to this church, which could be affected by the changing population of successive generations that can no longer identify with its role as a sacred institution that is deeply rooted in the Lebanese cultural identity.

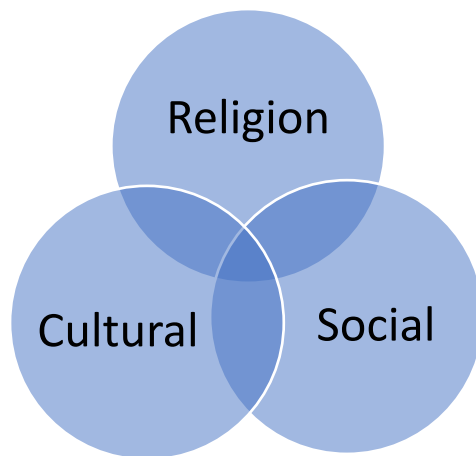
### **Pillars of Sustainability**

Analysis of the four core themes to emerge from the data demonstrates the fact that the relevancy of the church is not limited to one particular element offered through attendance.

Rather it is a complex interrelationship between constructs that sustain the loyalty and commitment of the members. These three constructs, social, cultural, and religious, are significant in the overall experience of the individual and interact in a manner that allows for complete fulfillment through their membership. The pillars of sustainability arrived from narratives and survey data contributed by the participants. The present congregation is comfortable with the current state of the church while also seeing the necessity for adjustment to assure the continuation in the future, as noted in the post-interview survey. Based on the results from the end of the study survey on sustainability submitted by the participants, five sustainability areas emerged from the responses that merge tightly with the emergent themes gathered from the data.

The responses related to sustainability tie directly to the findings from observation and interviewing. There is a nuance of exclusivity, lack of religiosity, and membership loss among the younger generation. Based on the findings of the sustainability survey, the congregation recognizes the need to move forward in the areas that are most relevant in the sustainability of the church include religious education and stress spirituality, community building, emphasis on Maronite identity, adaption to church changing population, leadership and youth involvement and outreach. In the post-interview survey relating to topics of sustainability of this organization, some respondents spoke of the need to place more emphasis on the uniqueness of the rite and its traditions to increase spirituality. This focus would include educating members of the traditions and practices starting at a young age to adulthood. These respondents speculated that having a clear understanding of this Eastern rite and its traditions would lead to a greater appreciation of the liturgy and increased spirituality among the church members.

The data from the sustainability survey validate how each of these constructs intervenes and depends on each other in the discussion of sustainability (Figure 10). When assessing the responses, the expressed desire for a complete church meeting the needs at all levels was demonstrated. The three pillars of sustainability include the three constructs of religion, culture, and social belonging. All three interconnect in a manner that one cannot fail without impacting the success of the others. When all three constructs interact with each other and overlap in harmony, sustainability is possible.



*Figure 10.* Pillars of sustainability of the Maronite.

**Religion.** Areas stated in need of change or alteration in this construct would include a greater emphasis on the rite's divine essence. This greater emphasis corresponds with the findings that the purpose of the church among this population as a place for spiritual guidance and worship appears to be marginalized by the cultural emphasis. The church duality of being both sacred and a secular institution has resulted in the absence of spirituality noted by the members. In the effort to preserve the church's identity as a place of worship, participants mentioned implementing spiritual development, devotions that are uniquely Maronite, relevant

sermons and more exceptional spiritual leadership, and community engagement with the Catholic church's adult vocation and religious education for all ages including adult congregants.

**Religious and cultural intersection.** There is the overlapping of ideas between the pillars, which strengthens their effect. As noted in the findings, one of the most prominent themes to emerge was social-psychological, in that the church attendance practices of the participants were strongly influenced by their need for cultural fulfillment and affirmation. This desire for cultural renewal implies that the church is a necessary element in the formation and affirmation of the ethnic self. Without these underlying sacred boundaries of the rite, membership for self-affirmation would be meaningless. Understanding the overlap between the two, areas of attention are tied to continued religious influences related to the feeling of belonging. In the survey, these areas would include reaching out to the newly arrived Lebanese in solidarity, no movement towards Americanization or fully Arabic liturgical vernacular, less secular and more religious events for youth and social gatherings focused on religious ceremonial events as well as cultural events.

**Cultural.** The findings show that the cultural element of church attendance is the most compelling force among this population. To retain cultural elements without marginalizing the church's purpose, there are suggestions that it will result in a significant level of effectiveness. Some of the noted areas of change or improvement include greater emphasis on the cultural significance of the rite, continued focus on the cultural identity of the church, utilize the perspectives of the newly arrived Lebanese immigrants to keep the culture alive, and have more

representative cultural events that promote the food, language, dance, and music to the population.

**Cultural social intersection.** This intersection of the two constructs of cultural and social is an essential element of this pillar as it ties strongly to the findings from the interview. Since the influences for attendance are weighed heavily in this area, many responses to the sustainability survey centered on this construct. Ideas include greater community outreach and engagement, community-building events centered on the Lebanese culture, more cultural youth group involvement, greater involvement of youth in cultural events, the inclusion of Lebanese who have strayed, and more activities sponsored through church groups.

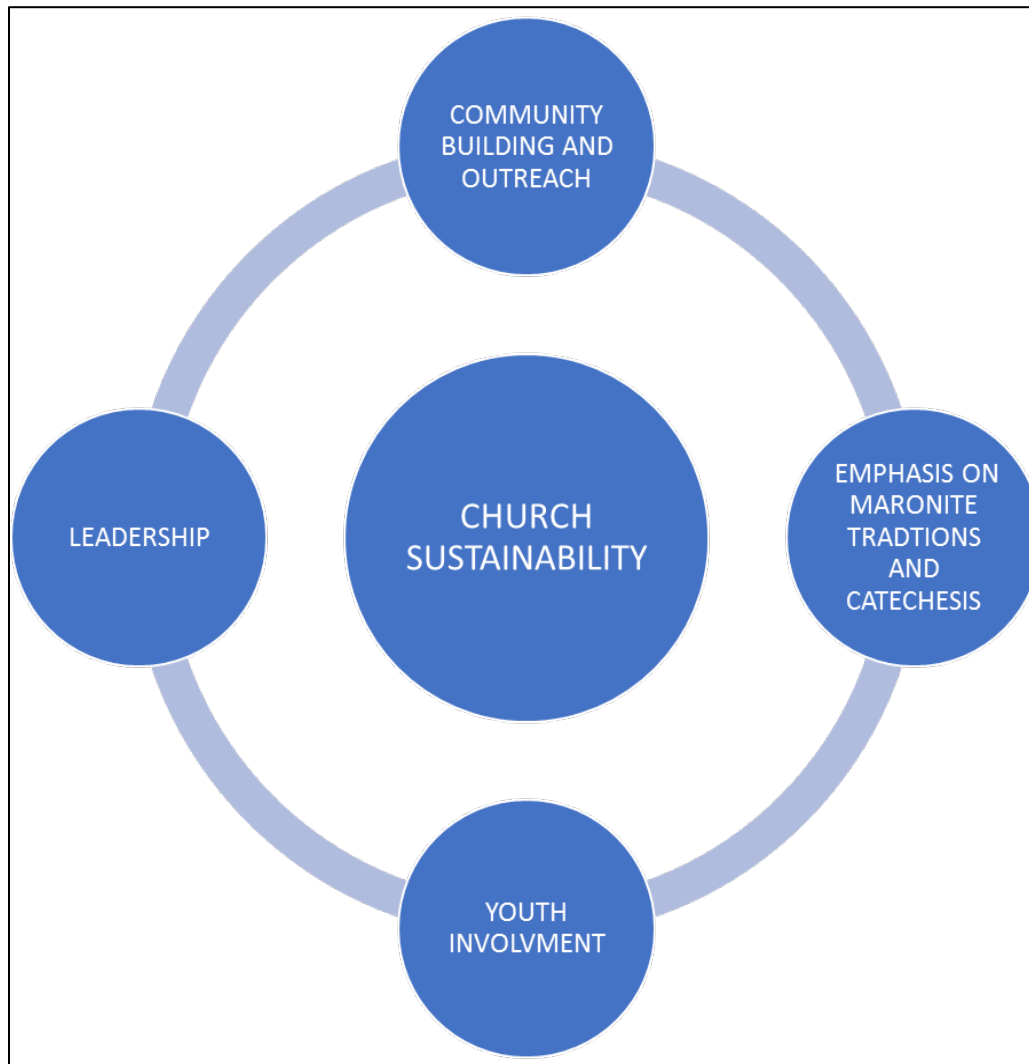
**Social.** The desirability of belonging is strong among the participants and possessing or inheriting specific roles within the group has supported most in their continued affiliation. Findings showed how this entitlement of membership has resulted in exclusion for many who would otherwise be members of the congregation. It is not feasible to demand inclusion. However, awareness of this exclusion does allow the members to seek out effective ways to increase the population, which would result in increased membership, growth, and longevity at this site. Areas of improvement include community outreach and engagement to fellow Lebanese Americans and Catholics, more fundraising events for the community at large, increased availability of social organizations and groups, incorporate more social media to reach younger population, and greater youth involvement at all levels of the church operations.

**Social and religious intersection.** The church is a place of gathering that extends outside of religious attendance practices and spirituality on Sundays. As noted, many of their social activities are centered on the church and involve members of the church during the week. These activities are sometimes strictly personal and not related to the church. However, they involve

the church members due to the close relationships created by the church membership. Ideas mentioned on the sustainability survey relate to this intersection of the two elements, social and religious, include volunteerism, leadership, and proprietorship within the realm of church-related community-building events. Suggestions include more emphasis on inclusion of leadership for youth, diversity in leadership roles, flexibility in religious and social activities for greater involvement, Religious based outreach and engagement activities, approachability, retreats, and increase involvement and participation of liturgical layperson roles.

### **Sustainability Survey Responses**

Following the interview, a sustainability survey was sent to each participant seeking their perspective on how the church has actively met the needs of the faith-based community and areas in which the church has not addressed the needs of the members. The responses were analyzed in which four prominent areas the participants felt need adjustment in the pursuit of sustainability included, increased community building (as being an asset that has promoted sustainability and an area that needs more considerable attention), emphasis on the Maronite traditions (as being an asset in the longevity of the church as well as a greater need for increased emphasis on the uniqueness of the rite), leadership (strong leadership and a need for sharing the leadership roles), and youth involvement (need for increased youth opportunities in all areas of the church events and operations). The main areas of sustainability are interrelated and dependent upon each other as noted in Figure 11.



*Figure 11.* Sustainability survey response categories.

### **Achieving Sustainability**

At one time or another, all religious institutions face the challenges associated with relevance and continuity based on changing congregational needs and changing societal views countered with antiquated religious practices and traditions. To offset these influences, many ethnic churches meet the social and religious challenges by changing within and altering their presentations to attract a broader congregation. While other ethnic churches may have found sustainability through ritual and communal adaptation, the Maronite Church is not afforded the

same freedom in its adaptation process. Unlike other ethnic churches in America that have avoided extinction by adaptation in their vernacular or appeal to a broader diverse congregation, the Maronite rite has been able to retain its distinct sacred identity without adaptation or extinction. The continued relevance of this Church is rooted in its commitment to preserving its ancestral sacred heritage valued by its members while retaining its ecumenical mission. What makes the San Antonio site especially attractive is its ability to retain its congregation through the generations without adaptation due to its secure connection between its sacred identity and its members' cultural identity. While this is an anomaly in many ethnic churches, this cultural connection between the faith and its followers has been the dominant force in the Maronite Church in America and specifically the San Antonio site's survival ability. The Maronite Church's products and services have a constant value among the congregants who find meaning and significance in the liturgy's distinctiveness.

Throughout this study, the findings support the inherent need to preserve the Maronite Church due to its ethnic affirmation qualities. It is advisable to extend this study and implement a plan of action that will ensure the Church's continued viability using the developed Capability Model found in this chapter. This sustainability tool would allow the Church and its community to identify the strengths and the weaknesses of the institution and its members when addressing both external and internal challenges specific to this site. A proposed model of sustainability must not only address the future of the Church as a viable institution but also remain within the boundaries of its current ability to ensure the maintained membership of the congregants who continue to follow the theological beliefs and teachings of the rite in its current status. In addressing these issues, a Capability Model will aid the Church and its community in their attempts to preserve the Church and secure a viable future. This plan was developed when



addressing the needs of this site and its members, using components that are applicable in every step of the process to assure success. When examining the data from observations, interviews, and the sustainability survey, it is evident that a systematic plan will be a valuable tool based on the elements of the Church and the population. Understanding the needs of the Church and its congregation will be an asset to the Church as it seeks to continue being relevant among the current population and aim for equal relevance among the future generations. This plan should also focus on attracting the non-attending Lebanese American population since the elements that appeal to the current participants are equally relevant to this group. This plan would bring to light areas of weakness, such as community building and community outreach and inclusion issues. The implementation of this model is beyond the scope of this study; however, the data produced from the study can be the catalyst that sets a plan of action in motion by understanding the factors that influence membership and the identified areas of strengths and weaknesses that will aid in addressing future challenges.

Because of the multidimensional nature of organizational culture, it is difficult to prescribe a single course of action to attain sustainable operations. Examining the areas relevant to the members will allow the Church to move forward in meeting the needs of the current population while laying the groundwork for future populations. Based on the findings, this organization's sustainability is strongly related to the Church's social culture bounded by shared ethnic heritage and familial origins. The participants' experiences as members of this Church circumscribe their construction of the Maronite image over the generations. It has withstood the test of time due to a consensus on this image by all members. This group has created the face of the Maronite in this Church, and any deviation from the collectively molded ethos would have a ripple effect, which would undoubtedly influence its membership and the commitment level.

This shared identity has propelled the Church for nearly a century, and in its journey, has created an active fellowship that has survived the test of time for this ethnic church. These are qualities that should not be tampered with to avoid the loss of membership; instead, they should be reconsidered and realigned with the future congregants' needs to assure continued relevance. Considering the areas relevant to the members allows the Church to progress forward, meet the needs of the current population, and lay the groundwork for addressing the needs of future congregants.

### **Capacity-Building Framework**

The first step in determining the capability is to examine the capacity of the religious institution and its members. This work proposes that this faith-based community is unique because of its distinct ecumenical character, as well as the role that it has sustained among the successive generations of Lebanese Americans. There is a strong desire for the preservation of this rite among the faithful is a deliberate act to preserve their ethnic identity maintenance. The St. George Maronite Church members' goal is to have a part of their ancestral heritage and personal histories preserved through the continuation of their local church. Celebrating their sacred and secular heritage at both personal and collective levels has the most meaning for them. The objective of the Eastern rite is to remain a place of worship for those who abide by the teachings of the Church and wish to worship together as Maronites. The target is to arrive at a plan that benefits the individuals involved and strengthens the institution's capability to carry out their responsibilities more effectively. A capability plan would support individuals, groups, and the institution's ability to identify and solve growth problems over time, with continued viability (Morgan, 1998).

To ensure the continued growth and success, it is necessary to examine issues relevant to the institution and its followers and arrive at a framework that fulfills both parties without encroachment on one or the other. The capacity to maintain its relevance requires reflection on where the community is now and where it wishes to be. The endogenous change demands cooperation between the institution and its leaders and members (stakeholders) to assure that neither conflict with the other's goals (Morgan, 1998). The plan requires a high level of support by the community but must benefit individuals invested in its existence, without weakening the capacities of the Church. The external context (historical, cultural, and social) of assimilation will have an impact on this Church due to the institution's nature as a distinctive ethnic church serving successive generations living in the American milieu. The internal effects of adaptation and abandonment of sacred and secular identities due to continued integration will have an equally devastating effect on the church membership as their children and grandchildren move further away from their ancestral heritage. With continued integration into the American culture, these individuals may no longer recognize the need to identify with the Lebanese culture or its religious institution rooted in this culture.

**Capacity levels at this site.** Building a capability framework requires the utilization of the three levels of capacity (environmental, organizational, and individual) as the optimum starting point for increased performance. An essential step in this process is to examine the members' roles as internal forces within this institution, as well as the pattern of positions, resources, strategies, and values. For any sustainability model to function effectively, it must apply a cooperative approach, understanding the needs of both the individual/group and the institutions when developing a plan to deal with external forces that will have an impact on the vitality of the site. It is necessary to investigate each level of capacity or capability before

addressing both external and internal issues affecting the institution and its members.

Determining the strengths and weaknesses at each level in a systematic manner will support the implementation of a capability plan. The three levels of capacity must align for success. Using this model for this site offers an opportunity to address the multilevel dimensions of action necessary for this site's success.

***Environmental level.*** The necessity to examine the external or environmental construct focuses on assumptions (abandonment of sacred and secular identities), external conditions (Eastern traditions and practices in Western society), and the risk (loss of relevance) to sustainability. Researchers must pay attention to all aspects or levels in order to implement the plan accurately and make it viable. Examples of the external context surrounding this ethnic-religious institution include the challenges of a changing population, the movement away from the ethnic identity affirmation received from Maronite Church attendance and changing social environments.

Boudreau and Ramstad (2005) refer to sustainability as “achieving success today without compromising the needs of the future” as the key to sustainability (pp. 129-130). Up to this point in time, success has been based on the cultural dependence between the rite and its followers. Although the needs of the current congregation are defined and distinct, it is difficult to predict the future's needs. While the duality of the Church had been sufficient over the past century, there is evidence that the impact of a changing population might alter the course, with the possibility that future generations' needs might not be the same due to the plausible impact of continued assimilation. Seeking out measures to address the changing needs of future congregants might be more challenging because of this dichotomy created by the current members. The current members of this community feel a strong sense of obligation and need to

preserve their ancestral heritage and rely on the distinct liturgical elements of the rite for their cultural and social identity. Whether these members have continued to impart this self-understanding to their children is undetermined from the findings. The reliance on the strong ethnic presence of the Church in identity formation had secured its place in the Lebanese American population over the past century. Assuring that future generations can find the same level of fulfillment within the church walls rests on the ability of the Church and its members to actively instill in future generations the same level of relevance in order to be successful in its mission.

***Organizational level.*** This level includes the readily available human resources (their ability and desire to implement change within the organization), physical resources (finances and facilities), intellectual resources (leadership, desire for systematic change, and management of implemented programs), institutional linkages (community partnership with San Antonio, other Maronite Churches, and Catholic institutions), and available incentives for change (growth, inclusion, and preservation of the rite).

The organization-level capacity will determine how individual abilities are utilized and strengthened. At this organizational level, it is optimum for the Church's religious leaders to remain focused on the Maronite rite's needs and priorities as a whole, not limited to the vision for this site. At the same time, for the visualization of the capacity, there must be a focus on this particular site, understanding the universality of the Maronite rite as applicable to this site and its connection to San Antonio.

The Maronite Church was incarnated in the Eastern environment, and the Lebanese culture recognizes that to exist in the American culture where its followers reside, it must acknowledge this change and seek innovative ways of addressing the faithful's changing needs if

it wishes to remain relevant. The development of a culture of sustainability supports the clear articulation of the values and beliefs that underpin the Church's objectives as a spiritual leader while maintaining significance among its church-going population in the future. The goal of any sustainability movement should be to continue focusing on the organization's needs and not divert attention away from the core. The core vision of this religious institution is spiritual leadership in a manner that is following the rite. When looking at the sustainability of this Eastern rite, the goal is to remain focused on its vision and mission and what makes it stand out in the religious arena. The task of serving its followers bounds this sacred institution; there is also the need to acknowledge the shared values, ideologies, and meaning-making patterns of the members who attend the Church as part of the sustainability equation.

***Individual-level.*** The individual level is the core of the plan, surrounded by the organization's objectives and the influences of the environment. At the individual level, the congregants' recognition of the necessity of their contributions is essential. The adequacy of abilities and resources is measured to determine if the goals are feasible and desired by the members. It is the individuals' knowledge and skills that will set the plan in motion and sustain it over time for success. Exploring sustainability ideas should come from within the community but stay within the Church's capabilities and obligations that align with its purpose worldwide. Sustainability can be achieved with continued attention to the community and its needs, as expressed in the data when focusing on the future. If this sustainability plan aligns and blends in with the community culture, the chances for success will increase.

Relatable changes should arise from the characteristics unique to this community in a better effort to gain internal acceptance and support. The Church should look toward the future, with the knowledge that the current membership is a solid base with an abundance of resources

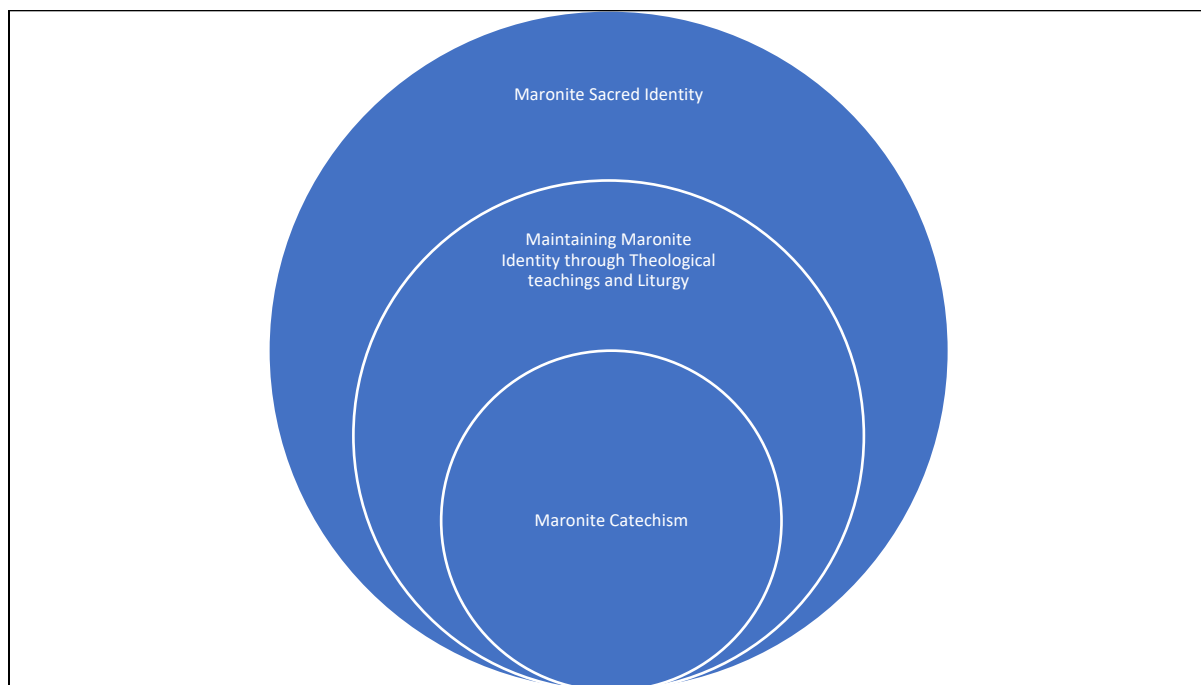
waiting to be tapped. Embracing the distinctiveness of the faith and the involvement of its multigenerational community ensures evolving growth. As evident in the congregants' commitment level, the continuation of the Church is a priority, as a place for both the practice of their Catholic faith and cultural renewal. Avoiding tampering with these elements is beneficial to meet the organizational and communal needs. The evidence from the gathered and analyzed data suggests the necessity to look within the community and its institutional leaders when seeking a cooperative plan that preserves the Maronite rite and continues to provide meaningful services for its members.

An effective leader understands the value of solidarity and seeks to guide and lead the members in a manner that recognizes the impact of decisions. Being cognizant of the products and services offered and ensuring alignment with the vision of the Church are the utmost duties of the leader. Being aware of the community's needs, satisfying the community, and aligning the community's needs with the institution assure more significant success. The findings suggest that it is the strong influence of the community that has shaped the ethos of the church in San Antonio. The demonstrated high level of proprietorship supports the high degree of active community involvement and commitment. Change can be successful by tapping available knowledge and resources. The members' understanding of the rite and the proficiencies developed over the generations in the preservation of the Church and the community is useful. Equally valuable are the positive attitudes relating to the issues centered on the Church and the community. These include the interest in, the vision for, and the commitment to change for the betterment of the Church.

This awareness of the need for modifications coming from the efforts of the community is a clearly stated vision of the members, as demonstrated in the survey responses. For example,

some changes would include a greater emphasis on the Maronite rite identity, higher enrollment in religious programs, increased community building, and greater outreach. Each of these elements requires the members' contributions and support, guided by the church leaders. Instead, it is a frame of mind that is implemented and becomes part of the Church's internal culture of being.

One level cannot overshadow another level, nor can it be disconnected from the other levels. Human resources must be cultivated and engaged, focusing on a shared vision, interest in the project, the skills required for the program's success, and the program's promotion to ensure the fulfillment of its objectives. Once implemented, it requires continuous monitoring and evaluation to determine whether the plan is working to address the identified needs and move the Church toward growth. An example of an issue the emphasis on the Maronite rite, as mentioned in the participant survey, would be outlined in Figure 12.



*Figure 12.* Levels of capacity example. This model sample is derived from an adaption of the Matachi Capacity Model (2006).

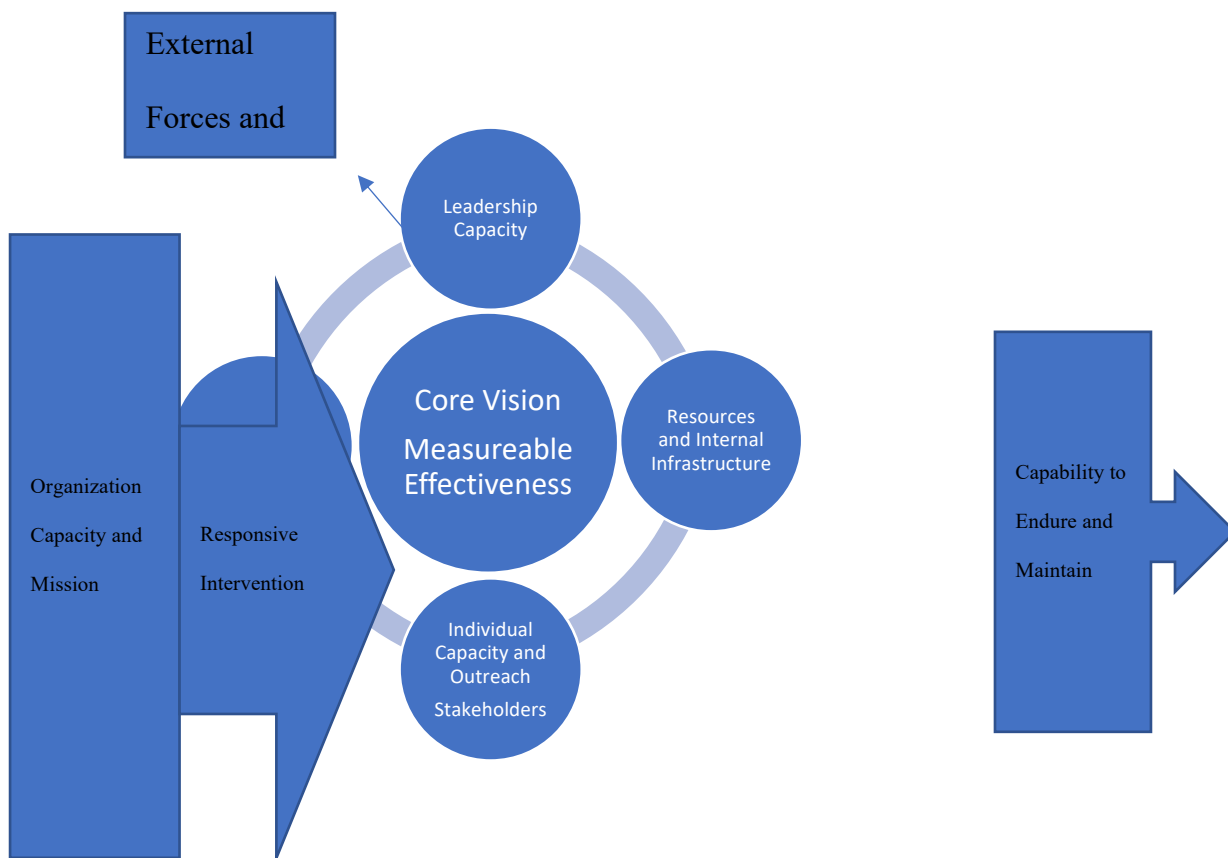


## **Organizational Capability Framework**

The issue of sustainability focuses on the long-term effectiveness of the ethnic church as an agent of cultural preservation as the congregation continues to experience continued assimilation (abandonment of its ethnic identity). When faced with sustainability issues, the most systematic approach for goal meetings is the application of a Capability Model that utilizes the ethnic churches and its members' capacity on all levels: environmental, organizational, and individual. Implementation of the model for both long-term and short-term goals attests to its flexibility. The model will allow the maintenance of identity while promoting survival, growth, and involvement. With a systematic approach, the organization can empower its members to make a change that is appropriate and agreed on for success through the collective ability of the organization and its members. Developed as a tool for meeting demands and strengthening the status quo, the model will aid this institution and its members when implemented. The sustainability plan explores the community's resources, operational ability, and support while assuring that church objectives are met. Sustainability does not always entail a drastic change, but it is often equally effective when small modifications strengthen the institution's proficiency.

Understanding the levels of capacity among all parties involved in the maintenance of this church makes it easy to see how cooperation across the levels will ensure success. Applying each element's capacity or level in a Capability Model will provide the tools needed for success with the goal of longevity. One level cannot initiate change; it takes a mutual understanding of needs, resources, and actions to implement change in the right direction. As supported by the data, this faith-based community serves a dual purpose, both sacred and secular. The church has been able to sustain itself with the dedication of its community, and the community has benefited from the church's existence as the last reminder of the members' treasured ancestral heritage.

When using a Capability Model (Figure 13), the elements must remain focused on the vision while incorporating cooperation involving the leadership, services, available resources, and outreach, as applicable. When faced with external forces (for example, assimilation of the population), the process calls for interaction among the organization's components. The individual is necessary for a workable solution and outcome.



*Figure 13.* Long-term and short-term goal capability model.

**Capability model elements.** This study's findings demonstrate that the firm reliance on the ethnic affirmation is the strong motivator in attendance. Because of the ties created over the generations have bound these participants to the church in a deeply ingrained level of

commitment. With the understanding that this institution is an organic unit, that has many influences that support its vitality. Because this is a community that vested in the success of the church and the church, which has an equally vested interest in continued growth, working together to achieve viability, cooperation is assured. Identifying patterns and practices of being a unified community of faith will guide the process in a way that will be supported at each level. Institutions' needs remain constant; however, the subsequent generation members' needs might not be met to the fullest. As a result of the internal and external factors of influencing membership, the church can have strong or weak incentives to focus on the completeness of their institution to assure continued relevance. The plan's implementation is a proactive and planned mobilization of the church, which allows it to continue to contribute to its mission in among the present congregation and prepare it to meet the challenges that might arise in the future.

After the needs of the community have been expressed, enhancement of capacities of the individual or infrastructure follows. Enhancing the needs of the members strengthens the link between the program that supports capacity building and ensures adequate support to the programs that how capable the church is to utilize its members to their full potential. Capability is possible when all capacities are considered and used appropriately in a unified manner. The implementation of a capability model can occur after capacity is met. The model created must be followed cooperatively, each capacity element considered before capability achieved.

The radius of the outer rings (products and services, individual capacity, resources and infrastructure, and leadership) contributes to the central idea (core vision). Each element of the Capability Model represents influences that understand the requirements of the cooperative position of each element to achieve success. On the studied site, the inevitable external forces have been faced and will continue to be encountered as it strives to remain relevant among

subsequent generations. Both external and internal challenges should be addressed with a response that activates intervention, setting the plan into action while being cognizant of the institution's mission. At all times, the need for great leadership is mandatory, and depending on the response, it can be the determining factor that can positively or negatively drive the response. Leadership is present at all levels, comprising church officials, layperson leadership, and community members. Resources are crucial for the success of any plan; knowing what and who can be counted on is valuable during the process that aligns with the institution's capacity. Often, there is a need to reach out beyond the walls of the church and seek support from other resources; this is a detailed plan that applies to this community, which might strive for higher community building on the site, the Catholic community, and San Antonio. When implemented correctly, this model should support the site in increasing its capacity.

***External forces.*** These include all emerging external influences that can have impacts on the organization or its members. These forces are measurable with the advancement and growth of the church in an ever-changing dynamic environment. The religious arena is competitive, and the external factors are forces that mimic public expectations and needs. The external forces of integration and ethnic identity abandonment can be addressed through the proper implementation of a sustainability plan. For these reasons, external influences and forces cannot be ignored or dismissed if the Maronite Church wishes to remain viable. External forces may be positive drivers promoting growth or a refocus of vision or negative forces that can threaten the institution's existence. External forces can also be reinforcements of the status quo that conform to the community's expectations. These external forces can push the institution to change or pull it into a new era, depending on its reaction and willingness to elicit change.

***Responsive intervention.*** The need to inquire about or address influences and environmental forces is the first step in addressing institutional capability. When activated, the move toward identifying the appropriate action begins with targeting and utilizing the leadership, products, services, outreach, or resources to ensure that change or endurance is achieved. The need to emphasize the Maronite rite identity, as stated by many participants in their survey responses, correlates with the narratives on the important influences centered on the distinct liturgical elements. Thus, responding to this need to strengthen the community is the first step in identifying and achieving completeness. The intervention will begin with assessing the capacity of each element and cooperatively arriving at a plan that would address increased Maronite ritual awareness.

***Core vision.*** The organization's clarity of vision underpins this process. As applied to this site, this would be the ability to continue providing spiritual guidance in a manner that is true to the purpose of the Maronite rite. Since the fifth century, the Maronite Church's goal has been to defend the Catholic faith in a culturally relevant manner, and this goal has not wavered even after its expansion worldwide. Its followers are those who wish to practice the theological teachings and worship as members of a worldwide community. The institution's vision is reflected in its leadership, programs, use of resources, and providing services. The need for revisiting the core vision depends on the community's changing needs and the strength of the external forces that might have an impact on this vision.

***Leadership.*** Effective leadership is key to any successful organization or institution. Leadership in this religious institution involves both clergy and laypersons, which can result in conflicts if there is no atmosphere of shared goals and vision. The clergy represent the Church and, as such, have the responsibility to promote its religious vision, provide spiritual guidance,

as well as be the site managers. Lay leaders represent the Church members, with the responsibility of staying within the boundaries of its vision. These individuals are congregants who sit on committees, comprise the board of directors, and participate at all levels of the institution's operations. Successful leadership cooperatively allocates resources, ensures that services are provided, and organizes outreach activities that enhance the reputation of the Church in the broader community. As a result of positioning, community leaders are unified in a problem-solving and decision-making manner that promotes the Church's vision while guaranteeing the fulfillment of its members' needs. Community lay leadership is voluntary, and the elder members of the Church hold roles. For the most part, these church members inherited their leadership roles and are often likeminded as a result of their shared familial history and generational level. Identifying good leaders and knowing when to replace obsolete ones is akin to sustainability. An additional quality of leadership positioning associated with sustainability is renewing leadership with younger individuals to bring fresh ideas and innovative approaches in order to lead into the future. Bringing new voices to leadership from a more diverse population that had been unheard of in the past would also be an opportunity to breathe life into the church's direction as it moves into the future.

**Resources.** Human and financial resources are critical components of the system's operation. These essential elements can affect the organization's ability to carry out its mission, attract competent leadership, and transmit its service and message to the community (DeVita & Fleming, 2001). The resources of this site arrive from various avenues—from the Church (the eparchy and the local site), donations, and the offertory. As noted in the findings, many of the resources (human and financial) also come from a multitude of fundraising events. These activities centered on the faith not only support and share the Church's image but also provide a

community on a broader base. The infrastructure refers to the Church's ability to implement programs utilizing the available physical structure on the site.

***Individual capacity.*** The resources also include human resources from the members of the Church, which the findings have demonstrated as profuse in the amount of time and energy given to the Church in support of its continuance. The individual capacity on this site is vast, with an abundance of ready and willing congregants that can direct the task of implementing change. With good leadership, these resources are utilized and allocated in positive ways to carry out the vision of the Church through programs, infrastructures, the staff, services, and outreach activities with the individuals' contributions to assure success. Since the individual capacity is necessary, it often requires these individuals to be on-site to implement successful programs, using their capacity to be a valuable part of the outreach to a broader base within the community.

***Outreach.*** An organization can have a vital mission, effective leadership, and sufficient resources, but unless recognized within the community, its impact will be limited (DaVita & Fleming, 2001). This faith-based community includes the members of the Lebanese American population in the congregations. They reside in the San Antonio community and are active in other areas of the Catholic community. Pulling from these areas, the Catholic community and the broader San Antonio area would increase awareness and support from these communities. Its outreach allows the Church to look outside its walls and selective community to increase public awareness and legitimacy that will result in a positive outcome. Outreach is a means of gaining acceptance among the broader population, supports collaboration and advocacy, and promotes networking. Outreach is also a resourceful way to raise funds through events, such as those held throughout the year on this site.

***Products and services.*** The persistent call for nonprofit organizations to demonstrate that their products and services make a difference in society and that they effectively use their resources heightens the need to measure and evaluate these products and services. Conceptually, organizational outputs, and outcomes are products of the multiple and cumulative interactions of vision and mission, leadership, resources, and outreach. Good leadership ensures that resources are allocated in a manner that supports the vision through the provided services. These services keep the Church relevant in the religious arena and the lives of its members. The products and services of this religious site aim to provide a comprehensive institution for sacred and secular renewal, which requires a delicate balance so that one element does not marginalize the other.

***Capability.*** Achieving capability implies that the institution or organization can ensure that its core vision endures using the four elements available. During this stage, periodic monitoring is necessary to manage the situation and assess its success. A strong sense of capability will empower the institution (and the community) and allow its preservation systematically and sustainably.

**Implementation of model at the site.** Implementing this model requires the identified need to be presented that activates the process. The identification of a need is preceded by the activation of the plan. Initiating this process involves community members, laity leaders, or church leaders. Understanding the capacity of all involved in the process must occur before moving to the next step of planning prioritizing, which is critical for the institution and adds value. Wanting to add or remove a program, for example, must be based on the vision of the institution and deliver a positive outcome. This means that although there may be a need expressed by the leader if there is no capacity to go forward with the idea, it will most likely fail.



Moreover, the same applies to moves made by the congregation that may not have the skills needed to implement the change, and the change may not align with the vision of the church or the key elements that must be maintained. Not all capabilities are at the same level. As the church works with these objectives, it can be broken down into different components that can be ranked related to the more substantial capability. To ensure alignment of the goals and objectives requires cooperation and a committee to identify how things happen and what needs to happen. The church is relatively static in its vision and change within the rite will not change. However, because the needs are continually evolving, how things are done can change depending on the congregation's needs. Utilizing the capability model as a guide will focus on the objective when introducing new ideas that will gain dedicated support. The process of identifying capacity, ranking the capability needed for a move forward, and implementing the new ideas is a long and tasking process. It cannot be expected to occur overnight or within one meeting. It is essential to have committed individuals who understand the value of the outcome and are willing to invest time and energy to get to a sustainable end product.

### **Summary of Sustainability Discussion**

Understanding the factors that influence and attract the members to the Maronite Church allows an accurate development and implementation of a capability plan that addresses the needs of the studied site. This study has focused on the influencing factors that promote continued engagement in the Church among successive generations to gain a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of a religious institution. The presented Capability Model would be a useful tool for accessing and addressing the needs and the desires of the individual and the institution in a manner that does not disrupt the current population's attachment level while preparing for future generations. A common sentiment expressed by many of the interviewees is

the desire to have their children and grandchildren experience the cultural and religious aspects of the faith as they have. Their membership has allowed them to create a meaningful self-identity, one that completes their image of who they are as Lebanese Americans and Catholics. Understanding the influences of the members' engagement is worthwhile. Through a cooperative and well-thought-out process, their wished-for future can occur, and the Church's relevance can remain vibrant as it looks to the future. This study has examined the influences and their interrelations pertaining to the challenges that might emerge in the future based on the changing population and environment where the Church intends to thrive. Using this gained knowledge will contribute to the success of this model when implemented. Implementing this Capability Model is beyond the scope of this study. A follow-up to this study will introduce this model and assist in its implementation on the site.

### **Limitations of the Study**

What might be seen as advantageous by some researchers depending on their research topic and level of expertise, the limitations mentioned are noted based upon prior literature, the scope of the study, and my lack of experience in research and reporting. These limitations did not impact the worth of the study but are noted for personal reflection and understanding that will support further studies. These limitations do not speak of the weakness of the study, but rather are areas that can be improved with future studies that might come from this study. I am confident that my work is strong, and the findings are noteworthy and add to the study of ethnicity and religion.

**Population.** One noteworthy limitation is whether the studied population is representative of the total population or whether the study's scope is limited to the narratives of those who voluntarily participated and who might feel differently from other congregants. I trust

that the cross-generational sample represents the community and that the population accurately represents the Maronite population of the studied site. However, I feel that a future study should include a broader population at the church. This study focused on the subsequent generations of Lebanese Americans, to add to this population of their children would offer a clearer picture of the rate of integration this following generation and the level of ethnic abandonment that has occurred. Exploring the following generations would answer the question of how rapidly change is occurring and better equip the church in addressing the needs that might be prevalent among this population.

**Sample size.** The sample size was determined to be 21 participants due to the nature of the chosen methodology. Of the 21 participants, 15 were Maronites, and the remainder comprised of non-attendees. Although basing the research on a larger sample size gathered from other sites might have generated more transferable results, I believe that the sample size was neither too small for a qualitative study nor unmanageable so that significant relationships could be determined. The study was manageable and findings noteworthy, yet a more substantial population could add to the findings. Future studies might involve larger populations gathered from various sites to include a broader community. I suggest that future studies examine other Maronite Churches across the nation to gain a greater depth of knowledge related to the rite applicable to other communities with varied populations. Although the sample was smaller than those of other qualitative studies dealing with similar topics, in keeping with the utilized methodology, this number was large enough to uncover meaningful data yet not so large that much data would become redundant.

**Limited prior studies.** The lack of an abundance of prior research focusing on the Lebanese American and the Maronite faith was a limitation for this study. Because this research

topic has received little empirical attention, it has resulted in a broad scope imposed on this study, often seen as insurmountable for inexperienced researchers like myself. This study has successfully answered the question of the reasons for continued church attendance among successive generations. However, because it is of the few studies of its kind, it tended to be broad in scope that did not allow for a more in-depth study of the many elements that arose from the data. For this reason, further studies should build on it to refine the concepts discovered in this study. Not having a base from which my study could build upon placed me in the position of having a comprehensive study that incorporated many elements of this population and religious institution to provide clarity. Considering the relatively small Lebanese population in America, little to no research has focused on this group to build this study. Adding the more specific construct of Maronite religious affiliation makes the number even smaller. The limited amount of research conducted on religion and ethnicity is surprising in this multiethnic and multi-religious society. Also limiting for this study was the fact that much of the available literature was dated and did not focus on the present state of this church or its subsequent population. Also, many of the theories that applied to this study were outdated and did not extend into the generational level studied.

**Scope of discussion.** As a result of only a few years of experience in conducting research and producing an academic paper of such magnitude individually, the scope and the depth of the discussion could be improved when compared with the works of more experienced scholars. The latter's expertise would open the topic (which is highly pertinent and consequential in this study of ethnicity and religious practices) to a broader audience that could build on the concepts and the theory development. Being the novel study focusing on a particular population and religious institution, there were numerous areas of discovery that each could be expanded upon in further

studies that would add greatly to the knowledge base relating to ethnic identity among subsequent generations, the role of ethnic churches among subsequent generations, and an extension to the current thoughts relating to the study of assimilation in America.

**Researcher's familiarity.** Although it was beneficial to have a connection to the church and its population when initiating the study, there was a limiting element also present due to this familiarity. As mentioned in previous chapters, I am a third-generation Lebanese American who has occasionally attended the Maronite liturgy. Although I do not classify myself as a Maronite congregant, I do have relative familiarity with the community and the rite. In many ways, this is valuable positioning; however, it created limitations in the interview process. Familiarity with the participants and their reactions to the institution might have swayed the participants' narratives in a way that met the interviewer's perceived expectations, limiting her ability to ensure that the response was an accurate representation of the participant's feelings. I never spoke of his personal views relating to attendance practices, yet the participant might have assumed or speculated on implicit expectations. I made the deliberate act of never mentioning my ethnic heritage, yet all the participants knew this. I took great care to remain objective and unbiased, which required a great deal of reflexive journaling and deep reflection at every stage of the process. In the interpretation of the data, being a co-constructor of reality was taxing. There was the constant questioning if I had adequate training in this approach to ensure complete objectivity.

### **Recommendations for Future Studies**

There is a significant gap in the area of study that focuses on the relationship between ethnic affirmation and religious attendance practices. This is one of the limited studies that has focused on this minority group and its distinct religious practices. This study is a catalyst for

future studies, focusing on this group, as well as other groups with similar challenges relating to the maintenance of ethnicity behaviors among subsequent generations.

**Future research on Maronite Churches in America.** The Maronite Church has become one of the last authentic expressions of the ancestral heritage that is esteemed and valued by the studied population. Through attendance and community involvement, both sacred and secular identity can be activated and galvanized. It is evident in the study's findings that the development of their identity as assimilated Lebanese Catholics is strengthened through Maronite Church attendance. In this fact, it remains relevant and significant. In turn, this fact shapes the role of the church and the services it provides to its members. It is strongly recommended that similar studies be conducted to substantiate this research and move toward a better understanding of this distinct religious entity and its population. Studies on other Maronite Churches, with similar cross-generational representation across America and globally, would add credibility to this study's results and outcomes of such findings. Future studies would either support these findings or offer additional valuable knowledge that will aid in the sustainability of this Eastern rite in America. There are five Maronite Churches in Texas and over 80 in America with similar populations as that of the studied site. Approaching these various sites to continue the studies on the Maronite Church would be worthwhile in increasing the understanding of the phenomenon of the Maronite Church's role in the development of a strong ethnic and religious identity among third- and fourth-generation Lebanese Americans. The Maronite Church depends on the Lebanese people's continued ethnic awareness of its congregation, and it is the ethnic elements of the Maronite rite that continue to attract the Lebanese to this community. Understanding the multilevel needs of the Church and its members will aid in meeting the future challenges of the studied church and other Maronite Churches facing similar challenges.

**Future studies on other ethnic churches.** The challenges related to the Maronite Church apply to other ethnic churches and is not limited to the Lebanese population or this rite. The value of this study is not limited to the Maronite-rite church. As such, it is recommended that future studies expand to other ethnic groups and their religious practices that are unique and distinctive in American society. Additional studies will lead to a better understanding of such groups, contributing to the body of knowledge in the field of ethnic churches and sustainability that is scarce at this time. The objective of this study as a catalyst for future studies among various ethnic-religious institutions is apparent when attempting to achieve ethnic and religious objectivity in a pluralistic society. It is recommended that future researchers be encouraged to study other groups and conduct research that will add to the scholarly understanding of the relevance of ethnicity and religion and their impact on the individual, the institution, and society. This research contributes to the study on third and fourth generations and ethnic identity development through religious practices and affiliation that is lacking in the current body of knowledge. Limited past studies have approached this topic of ethnic churches. However, they have focused on the immigrant population and their children. They have not delved into the subsequent generations that might still receive social and religious fulfillment from their affiliation to ethnic-religious institutions.

As mentioned in the previous sections, the topic of religiosity was not a strong force in the responses relating to the participation of the Maronites in San Antonio. An additional recommendation would be to focus future studies on the construct of spirituality as a predominant reason for attendance in the ethnic churches or whether other ethnic churches align with this site and serve a multilevel role in the lives of their members. The role of an ethnic church is a topic that should be examined in further studies to determine if these results are

unique to this site due to its history or if it is prevalent in other locations. Due to the limited prior studies in this area, it is recommended that further research should verify if this is a random situation or if there is a commonality in the results that explain the Maronite Church's purpose and future relevance in America. Further exploration and conceptualization of this topic through qualitative and quantitative methods would be advantageous.

Another recommendation would be to examine the immigrant population to determine the role of the church and the reasons for attendance and then compare the two groups of attendees and non-attendees for a deeper understanding of the natural progression of the Maronites in America and the relevance of the church to an ever-changing population. Although the first massive wave of Lebanese immigration occurred over a century ago, which established most of the Maronite Churches in America, it is the second wave of immigrants from the Lebanese Civil War that has rejuvenated the Lebanese population in America and the Maronite Churches. Other ethnic churches have similar changing communities and would benefit from this understanding of the need among the different generational congregants. This type of study would be equally beneficial to other ethnic churches in America, given that the specific studied population is not crucial to examining ethnic churches and sustainability issues.

**Maronite leadership and multi-generational congregations.** As with all religious institutions, leadership is a vital aspect of sustainability. A final recommendation directed toward church leaders is related to the issues of sustainability of the Maronite Church in San Antonio and Maronite Churches in America at large. Leadership can have either a positive or a negative impact on any organization's capability, depending on the quality of its leaders and its ability to align its services with its members' needs. The needs of the congregation are varied, partially due to the multi-generational levels that currently exist at this site. The members of this site seek



not only spiritual renewal but also equally important to this group is ethnic renewal. Areas that are relevant to sustainability on this site, based on the final sustainability survey, would include an emphasis on religious education, a focus on the youth population that will be the base of the congregation in the future, and greater inclusion of the community within the church walls and of the broader San Antonio community. Understanding the forces at play against growth and addressing topics such as resources, leadership, and provided services will increase the likelihood of continued relevance of this site. It is recommended that a capability model be implemented on this site to address its weaknesses and strengths and allow a systematic strategy to address these issues in the pursuit of longevity. Implementing a capability model would be advantageous among the church leaders and provide a structured mechanism that could be applied to various needs of the congregation and the challenges that would arise in the future.

### **Summary of Study**

There are few sources to cite in the limited literature on ethnic-religious institutions or the connection between ethnicity and religion when addressing a changing population. Historically in America, the path of the ethnic church, affected by secular and religious assimilation, has resulted in the abandonment of ethnic identity for survival since the elements that make it distinctive are no longer identifiable by the subsequent generations. As several studies have shown, two possible paths are available to an ethnic church affected by a changing population—modification within the institution to remain relevant or extinction when adaptation does not occur or if inadequate adaptation is imposed (perpetuating the glaring lack of understanding of the members' needs). As has been observed over time, with many churches established by the immigrant population, the loss of cultural relevance eventually occurs, altering the attendance patterns of subsequent generations. When an ethnic church does adapt with the following groups,

a natural movement away from its distinctive vernacular (replaced with English), replacement of foreign-born leaders with American-born ones (in tune with the American culture), and inclusion of diverse/multiethnic congregants (representative of the community at large) occur. If the ethnic church does not make such adaptations to fit the needs of an Americanized congregation better, it becomes extinct.

The Maronite Church is unique in the fact that although minor adaptations have been implemented to serve better its worldwide congregation, such as the inclusion of English in part of its liturgy and occasional leadership by an American-born priest, it has, for the most part, maintained its sacred integrity as a distinct Eastern rite with the retention of its distinct theological teachings, ritualistic traditions, and liturgical presentation. This rigidity is justified because moving away from the Eastern elements of the church would marginalize its sacred authority as a distinctive Eastern rite within the Universal Church. Since it cannot change its real vision of celebrating the Eucharist in a manner that it was established to do, this rigidity to remain true to its vision results in need to consider a different path to be taken by the Church, which does not require religious identity threatening adaptation to avoid extinction. The fact that the Maronite rite has retained its ancestral sacred integrity has contributed to its longevity. The findings show that it is the distinctive Eastern elements that make this Maronite Church in San Antonio appealing to the selective group of Lebanese who wish to affirm and maintain their ethnic identity through their religious attendance patterns. The Maronite Church's appeal for many third-generation and fourth-generation members lies in its capacity to provide spiritual and cultural identity and empowerment within an individual's faith.

Based on its findings, this study demonstrates a viable third option for ethnic churches in America that allows continued relevance among successive generations while maintaining their

sacred identity. Providing a balance between ethnic, social, and religious celebrations for the cross-generation of Lebanese Americans has allowed cultural identity maintenance and reinforcement. In light of this discovery, this work recommends that this Maronite Church should focus on the positive elements of this community and continue to be aware of the needs of its congregation and its future members. This would require awareness of its precarious position as a meaningful secular institution of culture when implementing its vision as a culturally relevant religious institution. It does not have to forgo its distinctiveness to maintain a loyal congregation and being true to its sacred identity will keep it sustainable in the competitive religious arena.

This study provides valuable insights into this church. It should be considered a catalyst for other studies that will focus on the Maronite Church in San Antonio and other churches facing similar challenges in their communities. The value of this study is not singular. Instead, its value rests in the fact that it is the beginning of a conversation relating to the life cycle of the ethnic church, expanding from adaptation or extinction to sustainability while maintaining its core values, authenticity, and legitimacy as a unique element that adds to the American religious miscellany.

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## Appendices

## Appendix A: Consent Form

### CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

**Study Title:** Belief and Belonging; Case study of the Maronite Church

**Principal Investigator:** Rose B. Karam

**IRB Study Number:** 403

I am a student under the supervision of Dr. Alfredo Ortiz at the University of Incarnate Word, in the School of Education. I am planning to conduct a research study, which I invite you to take part in. This form has important information about the reason for doing this study, what I will ask you to do if you decide to be in this study, and the way I would like to use information about you if you choose to be in the study.

**Why are you doing this study?**

As part of a case study on diverse expressions of participation in Maronite church activities, I would like learn more about your engagement with the Maronite Church. The goal of this case study is to gain a better understanding of the Maronite Church attendance practices of 3rd and 4th generation American Lebanese in San Antonio, Texas.

The purpose of this study is to explore the reasons for continued attendance to the Maronite church by successive generations of American Lebanese in an effort to have a better understanding of the role this ethnic church plays in the lives of the assimilated population of Lebanese Americans. Understanding the reasons or rationale for continued affiliation and varied levels of participation among this population will lead to a better understanding of the future role of this church in America and the challenges this institution faces.

**What will I do if I choose to be in this study?**

You will be asked to answer a short demographic survey and then participate in a one on one interview about your level of participation at the Maronite Church located in San Antonio, Texas.

**Study time:** Study participation will take approximately 30 minutes for the completion of the demographic survey and an additional 90 minutes for the interviewing process. A total of 2 hours will be asked of you for your participation.

**Study location:** All study procedures will take place at St. George Maronite Catholic Church or at a designated public location that is convenient to the participant. Such locations might include the Church Hall or offices, local coffee shops or a San Antonio Public or University library.

I would like to audio-record this interview to make sure that I remember accurately all the information you provide. I will keep these tapes in a locked desk in my home office and they will only be used by myself. If you prefer not to be audio-recorded, I will take notes instead. I may quote your remarks in presentations or articles resulting from this work. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identity, unless you specifically request that you be identified by your true name.

**What are the possible risks or discomforts?**

Your participation in this study does not involve any physical or emotional risk to you beyond that of everyday life. The information you share will be your own perspective and words and there is no right or wrong answer. There is a small possibility that you may share some personal or confidential information or that you may feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics. You do not have to answer any questions or take part in the interview or sure if you feel the question are too personal or if talking about them makes you uncomfortable. Allowing your information to be used in this case study will not involve any additional costs to you. The findings of this study could be shared with other interested parties in this area of study. As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality of the information I collect from you could be breached – I will take steps to minimize this risk, as discussed in more detail below in this form.

**What are the possible benefits for me or others?**

There will be no direct benefit to you, however your participation will lead to a better understanding of the Maronite community and its relevance to its members. The goal of this study is to add to the body of knowledge relating to this distinct church and help in addressing the challenges it faces in its attempt to serve its current members and future members; your participation can assist in this goal. You will not receive any monetary compensation.

**How will you protect the information you collect about me, and how will that information be shared?**

Results of this study may be used in publications and presentations. Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. If results of this study are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used.

To minimize the risks to confidentiality, I will code the survey and interview information. There will be limited access to the study records, which will be stored in a locked desk in my home office. I will retain the information collected for one year and may use or share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers – if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you before I share it. The knowledge that is gained from this study will be shared with the research committee before it is published. Participants may request a summary of the results if desired. The researcher will publish the results in fulfillment of all doctoral work so that other interested parties may learn from the research findings. Nothing that you tell us today will be shared with anybody outside the research team, and nothing will be attributed to you by name. The knowledge that I get from this research will be shared with you and your community before it is made widely available to the public. Each participant will receive a summary of the results. There will also be small meetings in the community and these will be announced. Following the meetings, I will publish the results so that other interested people may learn from the research.

All data will be destroyed after two years.

**Financial Information**

Participation in this study will involve no cost to you. You will not be paid for participating in this study.

**What are my rights as a research participant?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to answer. If at any time and for any reason, you would prefer not to participate in this study, please feel free not to. If at any time you would like to stop participating, please tell me. We can take a break, stop and continue later, or stop altogether. You may withdraw from this study at any time, and you will not be penalized in any way for deciding to stop participation.

If you decide to withdraw from this study, the researchers will ask you if the information already collected from you can be used for the study.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or concerns about this research study?**

If you have questions, you are free to ask them now. If you have questions later, you may contact the researchers at [rkaram@uiwtx.edu](mailto:rkaram@uiwtx.edu) or by phone at 210-232-5124.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, you can contact the following office at the University of the Incarnate Word:

**Ana Wandless-Hagendorf, PhD, CPRA, Research Officer**  
**Institutional Review Board**  
**University of the Incarnate Word**  
**San Antonio Texas 78209**  
[wandless@uiwtx.edu](mailto:wandless@uiwtx.edu)  
**(210) 805-3036**

**Consent**

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Participant's Name (printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

**Consent to Record Electronically**

I permit Rose Karam to record an audio record of me for the research project. If the researcher determines that the study will benefit from the use of the recordings, she may use them for academic purposes only. I understand the recordings will belong to Rose Karam and I will not receive payment or any other compensation in connection with the pictures and recordings. I release Rose Karam and the University of the Incarnate Word from any and all liability that may or could arise from taking or use of the audio recording.

Name Printed \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

## Appendix B

### Maronite Rite Terminology

**Antioch-** City in northwestern Syria played an essential role in the development of early church expansion.

**Aramaic-** The language of the ancient Aramaean people. This language has survived as a liturgical language in the churches of the Syrian Traditions.

**Canon-** In liturgical terminology, the canon is the Eucharistic Prayer of the Divine Service.

**Catechesis-** Religious teaching, instruction, or preparation.

**Church-** “Church” Term with two primary meanings: its most universal meaning is that of the Community of Believers in Jesus, which finds fullness in the Catholic community. In a more narrow sense, “church” means a group of Catholics who are a particular church or self-governing.

**Eparchy:** Eparchial administration is generally by the Eparch with his presbyters as a whole; when not as a whole, a permanent council of consultors, usually senior priests, is consulted prior to any significant decisions. Latin rite, this governing body is referred to as a Diocese, while eparchy comes from Greek.

**Liturgy-** From the Greek word, liturgies are meaning the work of the people. In religious term refers to the sacramental ritual of the Church. In the Maronite Church is referred to Services of the Holy Mysteries (Quorbono)

**Maronite-** Referring to that Tradition of the Church, which claims a following from the fourth-century hermit monk Maron. It is one of five Syriac Catholic Churches.



**Monastic**-Referring to monks and monasteries. Because the Maronite Tradition has its origins with a monk, it is essential to understand this for not only a theological understanding of the Maronite Tradition but also an understanding of its spirituality and liturgical life.

**Qorbono**-Syriac for the offering (Mass).

**Rite**- a general word for ritual or set order of prayers for worship.

**Sui iuris**- Particular Church or self-governing with its own hierarchy, patriarch major archbishop, exarch or metropolitan and common with the See of Rome (Pope).

**Syriac**-A language closely related to Aramaic. It is a Semitic language that is kin to Hebrew and predates Arabic. Syriac is the Greek name given to the Aramean language.

**Traditions**- The fundamental meaning of Traditions in the Catholic understanding is the handling of the faith. Also, the collective experience and life of a particular Christian expression. This includes many things: particular origins, history, theology, spirituality, worship, literature, and disciplines.

**Vernacular**-The language naturally spoken by the natives of a given area.