

Winter 12-15-2018

# Adaptive Leadership and the Maronite Church

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## Digital USD Citation

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Adaptive Leadership and the Maronite Catholic Church: Strengthening and Growing the  
Maronite Catholic Church in the United States with Adaptive Leadership

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## **I. Introduction**

“The parish is the presence of the Church in any given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship, and celebration.” Pope Francis

The Maronite Church is a unique Eastern Catholic Rite church that traces its origins to the countries of Syria and Lebanon. Due to immigration patterns, many Lebanese Maronites have traveled outside of Lebanon in hopes of a better, more stable future, establishing themselves and their parishes in the cities that they have settled in. There are currently over eighty Maronite Catholic parishes in the United States that serve the many generations of Maronite immigrants in the United States.

The Maronite communities in the United States are strong, joining together with their Maronite and Lebanese roots. However, Maronite communities and parishes cannot treat their communities and parishes as stagnant entities. The ebbs and flows of the nature of life, influence of current events, and immigration patterns must be addressed through dialogue and actions. Because of the sensitivity and challenging nature of ethnic religious environments, the adaptive leadership framework would be the most suitable leadership practice in Maronite Catholic communities. Not only does adaptive leadership put the power in the hands of every stakeholder, it is practical framework that can be used by anyone regardless of social, professional, and/or economic status or title. The main requirements for adaptive leadership are the learning and discovery of the reasons behind the challenges facing a certain group of people and/or environment, as well as consistent and adaptive work (Grashow, Heifetz, Linsky, 2009). Adhering to these requirements will most likely lead to positive and successful results. If members of the Maronite communities adopt adaptive leadership practices, the Maronite Church

will experience growth and increasing community strength over time.

### **Historical Context**

It is important to discuss the history of the Maronite Catholic Church, as well as the religious and spiritual traditions that belong to it, in order to understand not only its uniqueness, but the relationship it has with its followers. By doing so, it is recognizable that the Maronite Catholic Church is a unique entity, one that its religious and spiritual traditions are instrumental to the establishment of the Maronite identity for both the individual and the community as a whole. Developing a broader understanding of the early history of the Maronite Catholic Church is necessary in order to become familiar with historical parameters that it has operated in throughout history and present day. Traditionally, the Maronite Catholic Church traces their origins and founding to a Syrian monk, Maron, who lived during the fourth and fifth centuries. Maron, who was later canonized as a saint, was originally a priest in Syria who decided to become a hermit in the city of Antioch. Followers flocked to him as he was an exceptional example of holiness, and performed miracles regularly (Kolvenbach, 1998).

Saint Maron is considered the founder of the Maronite Catholic Church, which is often regarded as a spiritual and monastic religious movement. His influence still remained strong after his death in 410 A.D., as over eight hundred monks adopted his way of monastic life, and were thus referred to as the, “Maronites”, which further established his following. The Maronite Catholic Church is the only church that has adopted the name from a person, rather than that of a city or country. The name highlights the esteemed relationship and reverence with Saint Maron, reflecting their deep and continued devotion to the founder (El Hajj, 2015).

St. Maron emphasized spiritual and ascetic aspects of living through his monastic lifestyle. He believed that God was connected to all, and all were connected to God. This led him

to establish practices within the Church that did not separate the physical and spiritual aspects of the world - actually using the physical world to deepen his faith and spiritual experience with God for himself, and others as well. St. Maron embraced the quiet and loneliness of his secluded life in the mountains, and often lived through harsh and dangerous weather. However, his complete immersion in nature allowed him to discover and have an intimate union with God, which is reflected throughout Maronite theology and practices.

The mysticism that propelled his combination of ascetic and spiritual teachings attracted many followers in Syria and today's Lebanon. He was an accomplished missionary with a passion for spreading the teachings of Jesus Christ. Through his missionary work, he was able to convert a pagan temple in Syria into a Christian Church. This was the beginning of the conversion to Christianity in Syria, which influenced the spread of Maronite teachings into Lebanon (Kolvenbach, 1998).

In their early history, the Maronite followers experienced immense amounts of persecution under the Byzantine empire, which drove them from their homes in Syria, the home of St. Maron, to the Qadisha Valley in northern Lebanon ("Maronites", 2018). According to Unesco, the Qadisha Valley is one of the earliest Christian monastic settlements in the world. It boasts of monasteries in dramatic positions amongst its rugged landscape. This was where the Maronite followers fled persecution, hoping for survival during tumultuous times of religious persecution ("Ouadi Qadisha", 2018).

The Qadisha Valley is inseparable from the story and history of the Maronites. Boasting of rugged terrain, natural caves, and at the foot of the highest peak in Lebanon, Qornet el-Sawda, the Qadisha Valley has served as a place of refuge and mediation for Maronite monks, hermits, and members of the religious community ("Qadisha and the Qannoubine Valley", 2018). The

term, “Qadisha”, which means “holy” or “sacred” in the ancient language of Aramaic, is home to the Holy River of Qaadish (Naher Qaadisha), and neighbors the, Forest of the Cedars of God (Horsh Arz el-Rab), which is mentioned multiple times in great spirit within the scriptures of the Holy Bible:

“The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God”.

(Psalms 92:12-13).

The Qadisha Valley is highly regarded as a factor that contributed to the survival of the Maronite Catholic religion and community, and is a place where many religious ceremonies and retreats take place. It often serves as a reminder of the persecution that the Maronite community and religion went through, as well as a reminder of the monastic culture, hermitistic habits, and tradition of the Maronite religion (“Ouadi Qadisha”, 2018).

### **Maronite Religious, Spiritual and Cultural Traditions**

The distinctive elements of the Maronite religious and spiritual tradition will be discussed in this section. It will highlight some of the most important religious and spiritual traditions that represent and compose the Maronite Catholic Church. Identifying and understanding the differences present in the religious and spiritual traditions of the Maronite Catholic Church solidifies and strengthens its own unique religious identity. It gives strength to the individual churches by emphasizing their unique purpose and religious history, and reinforces the purpose of establishing and maintaining the Maronite religious and spiritual traditions. Understanding the differences in religious and spiritual traditions of the Maronite Catholic Church will allow for further understanding of the Maronite religious identity as a whole, and give insight on the adaptive challenges facing the Maronite Catholic Church in communities within the United

States, which will be discussed later in detail.

After the Pope, the immediate spiritual leader of the Maronite church is the, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East. The current patriarch of the Maronite church is, Patriarch Beshara Boutros el-Rahi, who resides in the official residence and headquarters of the global Maronite church in, Bkirki, Lebanon. Despite being directly associated and reverent to the Universal Catholic Church, the Maronite Catholic Church has a specific religious and spiritual identity, practices, and traditions, as mentioned above. The language used in the Maronite Divine Liturgy (Aramaic, the Language of Jesus), the timing of feast days, and the celebration of revered Maronite saints are almost exclusively found in the Maronite Catholic Church. It is these distinguishing marks of character that separate the Maronite Rite from the various Catholic Rites from around the world.

The Maronite Church is one of five Eastern Rite sects of the Roman Catholic Church, and is the only Eastern Rite church that does not have a non-Catholic or Orthodox subset (i.e. Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic). In 2004, over five hundred Maronite clergy, religious, and laity from throughout the world met for the, Maronite Patriarchal Assembly. It was there that they discussed and identified the five distinguishing marks of the Maronite Church:

1. Antiochene Identity - The Maronites share a historical, spiritual, and liturgical heritage with all other Catholic and Orthodox Antiochene Churches. In addition, Maronites are the heirs to Syriac cultural and religious heritage.
2. Maronites are Chalcedonian - Maronites were strong supporters of the, Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D)., which taught that Jesus was true God and true man. It is this teaching that allowed Maronites to forever be in communion with the universal Roman Catholic Church.

3. The Maronite Church is Patriarchal and Monastic - Because St. Maron was a hermit and priest, Maronites have developed a cherished relationship and history of sacrifice and devotion.

4. The Maronite Church is devoted to the See of Peter in Rome - This devotion has allowed for Maronites to express their Catholic faith while maintaining their Eastern Catholic traditions.

5. Lebanon is the spiritual homeland of the Maronite Church - The Maronite Church will always be tied to Lebanon, its people, and the Patriarch who resides there.

Participating in both the Maronite Catholic Rite of Liturgy and the Roman Catholic Mass is doable, and often a reality for many Maronites living outside of Lebanon. However, in the Divine Liturgy of the Maronite Church, there are differences worth discussing that trace back to the Maronite monastic and hermitistic roots. The Maronite Liturgy is heavy with prayers, gestures, music, art, and architecture, which reflect the loving mercy of God that allowed the Maronite community to survive hundreds of years of persecution. It has two main sections, the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The Liturgy of the Word is regarded as the first part of the celebration, which involves prayers of forgiveness and focus on the particular Church season. Between the two liturgies, the Creed and the pre-Anaphora (Eucharistic prayer) takes place. The Liturgy of the Eucharist is based on one of the eight Anaphoras: Saint Peter, Saint James, Saint John, Saint John Maroun, Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Mark, Saint Sixtus, and The Twelve Apostles. The structure of these prayers remain similar, however the content of the prayers vary. In the Maronite Catholic Divine Liturgy, dedication of the Opening Prayer and Prayer of Forgiveness is to the recollection of the current season of celebration in the Church.

This is in contrast to the Roman Catholic Divine Liturgy, which offers their celebration of the Eucharist to those who have faithfully departed.

In the Maronite Catholic Divine Liturgy, the Holy Spirit is the principle minister; the beginning, end, and perfection of all things. This is particularly emphasized with the invocation of the Holy Spirit during the Anaphora, in which the Eucharistic prayer is regarded to reach its high point. However, in the Roman Catholic Divine Liturgy, the high point of Eucharistic prayer is considered to be during the recital of the words of the consecration at the Last Supper. The recollection of the Holy Spirit is reflected throughout the Maronite Catholic Divine Liturgy, as its invocation ends all prayers. Even though this sort of invocation of the Holy Spirit is present in the Roman Catholic Divine Liturgy, it is much more common in the Maronite.

Another element that is present in the Maronite Catholic Divine Liturgy is the repetitive use of incense, which is meant to convey feelings of awe and mystery and serve as a visual of an individual's prayers being sent up to God. Finally, the sign of peace that occurs immediately before the Eucharistic prayer, is a reminder that the community gathers to celebrate one body of Christ. Unlike in the Roman Catholic Divine Liturgy where giving the sign of peace is open to everyone, peace is exchanged at the altar without words, but through a simple gesture. This practice takes root from the Maronite monks practice of solitude and silence in the mountains of Lebanon. Once peace has been exchanged, those who are joined to give are allowed to pass on the greeting of peace.

As mentioned previously, St. Maron did not separate the physical and spiritual aspects of the world, which is reflected in the traditions of the Maronite Catholic Church. For example, during special feasts and rituals, water is blessed in various ways to give it a spiritual and blessed dimension. For example, during the celebration of the Epiphany, the holy water is blessed with a

lit coal to signify the fire of the Holy Spirit who entered the Jordan River at Christ's baptism. This not only ties the physical aspect of the world with the Maronite spirituality and tradition, but also their reverence to the Holy Spirit ("The Maronite Divine Liturgy", 2018).

The Maronite Catholic Divine Liturgy continues to use the Aramaic language throughout the ceremony. It is a Maronite tradition to continue to include the language of Jesus during certain parts of the divine liturgy. I have noticed that the location of the parish determines the language of use for the remaining parts of the divine liturgy. For example, in a community with a large population of second generation Lebanese-Americans, the remaining part of the divine liturgy will most likely be in English. This can be compared to a community with a large population of individuals who have recently emigrated from Lebanon, in which the remaining parts of the divine liturgy will be in Arabic and English.

Along with their religious and spiritual traditions, Maronites also preserve their Lebanese origins. For example, during the celebration of the Epiphany, my family prepares a fried sweet dough called, "zlabyeh". Another example would be the preparation of a spiced rice pudding, "meghli", during the celebration of the birth of Jesus. These examples show how the religious beliefs of the Maronite community oftentimes merge with the Lebanese culture. Based on my observations and experiences, the emphasis on family, and belonging within the community, can be seen in both the Maronite religious and spiritual traditions, as well as its cultural traditions. The Maronite Church has, and still does, have a special devotion to the Mother of God, the Blessed Virgin Mary. This permeates into many traditions of the Maronite Catholic Church, and shapes the view that many Maronites have regarding family, and the sense of belonging in the community. Many Maronite households have a special shrine to the Blessed Virgin Mary, which serves not only as a reminder to pray for her intercession, but as an offer for her protection over

the familial house and lives on the individuals within the family. In terms of the community, Eid el Saydeh (Feast of the Assumption), is often celebrated with gusto, which involves hymns, evenings of prayer, and social celebrations.

Based on the above information, it can be seen that there is an emphasis on tradition, acts of faith, and cultural practices that compose the Maronite Catholic faith, and bind the communities together both individually and collectively. These elements are unique, simultaneously connecting Maronites both to the Maronite Church in Lebanon, and the Universal Catholic Church as well. The tradition-centered lifestyle, which again, stems from the monastic and hermitistic lifestyle of many of the early Maronites, is intertwined in the Maronite identity, from its religious, spiritual, and cultural traditions.

### **Maronites in the United States**

In both Lebanon and the United States, the Maronite Catholics are a religious minority. According to the United States 2017 International Religious Freedom Report, the Christian population composes 32% of the total population of Lebanon. The remaining 68% of the population is Muslim. In the United States, the Maronites are considered the majority of the Lebanese population, at an estimated 33,000 people (Eparchy Brooklyn). At the beginning of the 20th century, a small number of priests and missionaries traveled to the United States in order to establish Maronite churches and parishes. Scattered across the country, there are around eighty parishes serving the Maronite community that have continued to grow since the early 1900's.

The horrific civil war in Lebanon greatly affected the Maronite Church and influenced the emigration of Maronites to the United States, as well as other countries, between the years, 1975 and 1990 (Beggiani,2015). Due to the ramifications of the Lebanese Civil War, which left the Lebanese economy, society, and political environment unstable, Maronites continue to

emigrate from Lebanon to the United States in hopes of a more stable future for themselves and future generations. The new Maronites that have settled in the various communities across the United States join the established parishes, and even begin new ones. Along with the second, third, and fourth generations of Maronites who have been part of the Maronite churches and communities since the early 1900's, the new Maronite immigrants work together to establish various community events and create committees and boards to plan and maintain social activities, as well as church maintenance and survival.

As the Maronite presence continues to grow in the United States, the need to establish two Eparchies became a necessity. There are currently two eparchies with their own respective bishops, the Eparchy of Saint Maron and Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, which are responsible for managing, strengthening and growing the Maronite communities based on their assigned territories. More than two-thirds of the Maronite clergy serving the Maronite communities in the United States were born outside of the country. This is contrast to the demographics of the Maronite laity, specifically the third and fourth generation Lebanese Americans who have limited knowledge of Arabic. The Maronite church has become a much more diverse community than before, as parishioners choose to marry non-Lebanese spouses, who then become involved in their respective Maronite parish community. Most Maronite Catholic Churches in the United States have two youth programs, the Maronite Youth Organization (MYO) serves ages 12-17, and the Maronite Young Adults (MYA) which serves ages 18-35. These organizations bring the younger generations together in celebration of their Maronite faith through regional and national retreats, as well as local social and religious events. They allow younger members of the community to get involved and make decisions that affect

many within their parish, as well as grow their own groups within their community (Beggiani,2015).

## **II. Statement of Technical Problem**

Like in many ethnic religious communities, the individual communities and parishes can and will experience growing pains. While each community is unique in its own way, that means the problems experienced by them are unique as well. This study is based on the adaptive leadership framework, meaning that there are two types of problems; a technical problem and an adaptive challenge. It is important to identify the difference between a technical problem and an adaptive challenge, as it is critical to the framework. A technical problem is easy to identify, and has a (easier) solution, whereas an adaptive challenge is difficult to identify and easy to deny, with a solution that requires learning, discovery, and consistent work (Grashow, Heifetz, Linsky, 2009).

The technical problem that is facing the Maronite Catholic Church in the United States both on local and national levels is the decline in attendance by Maronite Catholics across the board. According to interviews with different members of the Maronite clergy from across the nation, this is one of the most pressing technical problems facing the Maronite Churches. However, this is where the adaptive leadership framework comes into play, as the data collected through adaptive leadership practices highlights the adaptive challenges that are contributing to this specific technical problem.

## **III. Statement of Purpose**

Even though this research project discusses the specificities of the Maronite Catholic Church and community, I hope that this research will help other members of ethnic religious communities navigate various adaptive challenges within their own community, as well as those

who are a part of the Maronite Catholic community. This research was conducted in order to produce another resource for members of the Maronite Catholic Church in the United States that discusses the current events and attitudes present in the various local communities. Through an anonymous survey, interviews with Maronite clergy, personal experiences, and reviews of academic resources, I have been able to isolate three specific adaptive challenges currently facing Maronite Churches and communities in the United States. As an active member of this specific community, I see the ramifications of the unresolved and/or unaddressed adaptive challenges in the community. On a personal level, I will use this particular research as a guide to how I employ adaptive leadership techniques as I navigate through certain issues within my local and national community.

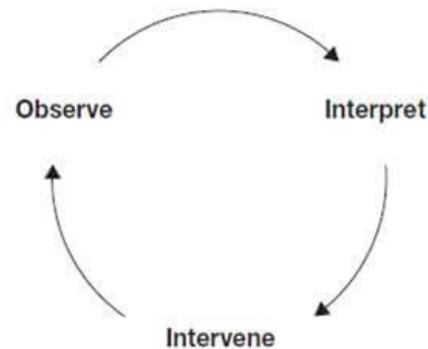
The adaptive leadership motto is, “observe, interpret, and intervene”. The following chart describes the process in detail:

<b>OBSERVE</b>	Observe patterns and events around you
<b>INTERPRET</b>	Interpret observations
<b>INTERVENE</b>	Design interventions based on the observations and interpretations made in order to address the adaptive challenges

In the book, the authors Grashow, Heifetz, Linksy, use the following figure to illustrate the process:

FIGURE 2-5

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**The adaptive leadership process**

The illustration of the circle reminds the individual employing adaptive leadership that the process is repetitive, building upon the previous step. The repetitive process allows the individual to refine their observations, interpretations, and interventions in order to best fit the changing environment and/or situations. The adaptive leadership framework emphasizes that learning and discovery are necessary, as the adaptive challenge is dealing with intimate aspects of an individual's identity in relation to their cultural, religious, social, and moral values. These particular aspects of the individual identity will most likely not be constant, as life is never stagnant. As cliché as it might sound, life is a journey full of ups and downs. Thus, causing individuals to change their identity and opinions along the way. With that being said, a valuable piece of information that a member of the Maronite clergy mentioned in an interview I conducted was this, "Everyone comes to church with a problem". It is important to recognize this sentiment in religious communities, as in the Bible it says,

"Come to me, you all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" Matthew 11:28.

Applying the adaptive leadership techniques to the adaptive challenges present in the Maronite Catholic Churches and communities that will be mentioned later, would allow the stakeholder to take the adaptive leadership framework into consideration, by viewing the church

as a system with specific values, and then using the techniques of learning and discovery to further their desired actions. Adaptive leadership allows room for the stakeholder to take into consideration a individual problems, or in general acknowledge that the situations will not always be transparent, and are layered with personal history, experiences, and personality traits.

#### **IV. Rationale**

Before I go into detail of the adaptive challenges I found present in the Maronite Catholic Churches and Community and how I identified them, I will briefly discuss my experience that has reinforced my confidence and effectiveness of the adaptive leadership framework. In the summer of 2017, I decided to attempt a new method of attracting individuals between the ages of 18-35 to my Maronite parish, as many chose not to attend and have become distant from the church. Many individuals from my church forego attendance throughout the year to both religious and social events, with the exception of our three-day annual Lebanese Festival. The decline in attendance by this particular age group has been discouraging as a leader, as I along with others work tireless planning social and religious events in hopes of attracting this specific demographic.

With a plan in mind, I contacted my friends who were active members that different Middle Eastern Catholic and Orthodox Churches in San Diego. I proposed that we start an organization that would unite all of our parishioners between the ages of 18-35 by hosting a variety of social events throughout the year. We would unite based on our common identity as Middle Eastern Christians, and as community members who balance both their ethnic and religious identity in a country that has many. The goal of this organization would be to encourage not only the parishioners from my church, but others as well, to get involved in their own respective parishes, as well as the larger Middle Eastern Christian community. The

organization, One Body, serves as a reminder that there is a community for everyone, both a large one of a variety of “types” of Middle Eastern Christians, as well as more specific communities dependent on rite.

In general, One Body has experienced extreme success with each event, as the number attendees and participants increase with the frequency of events. Most of the four involved churches have seen an increase in attendance at their weekly services, Bible studies, and social events. However, the church that has not seen an increase has been mine, the Maronite Catholic Church in San Diego, St. Ephrem. Not only did few continue to show up for any events at my parish, but very few showed up to One Body events as well.

Unlike the other leaders at the other involved churches, I took the decision to involve my church without consulting anyone else, and/or consulting the parishioners between the ages of 18-35. I naively assumed that these types of social events is what they wanted and needed. This is a classic example of treating an adaptive challenge as a technical problem, which after further research is what I realized was a reason that One Body did not phase the majority of the parishioners at my church between the ages of 18-35.

For me, this example solidifies the importance and practicality of the adaptive leadership framework. Adaptive leadership preaches that one must “learn and discover” in order become an effective and successful leader, learning and discovering the different influences, dynamics, and past and current happenings within the environment, then intervening and acting accordingly (Grashow, Heifetz, Linsky, 2009). In my opinion, the adaptive leadership frame allows the stakeholder to take everything into consideration (emotions, locations, experiences, etc.) before acting, allowing for the stakeholder to think of not only present consequences and results, but those of the future as well. I think that this especially important due to the nature of ethnic

religious communities, or any religious community, as it is a holy place for the individuals who choose to worship there, a place where they go to have deep conversations with the one that they worship, as they pray, worship, and are vulnerable to the direction and guidance of the one that they choose to worship.

This study is important to me because I am passionate about the sustainment of the Maronite Catholic Church in the United States, as well as the sustainment of the presence and strength of the various Middle Eastern Christian communities both inside and outside of their country of origin. The continuation of the presence of the Maronite Christian Church in the United States connects people to a larger ethnic community, and most importantly, helps preserve cultural, social, and religious traditions. I think that in a time where it is encouraged to be like everyone else, it is important to have a safe space, a community, where one can celebrate, “what makes one different”. Finally, I think that this study is important because the Maronite identity is evolving into something completely new, and I think it is important to address them in a practical and realistic manner, which can be done through the adaptive leadership framework.

## **V. Methodology and Methods**

### **Adaptive Leadership**

Adaptive challenges do not have one clear solution that can be practiced by one specific person of authority, and are best to be addressed by the individual(s) experiencing the challenges. In order to enact meaningful and lasting change, the stakeholders must change their priorities, beliefs, loyalties, and habits in order to become a positive and successful force within the environment (Grashow, Heifetz, Linsky, 2009). Before it is discussed why the adaptive leadership framework would be one of the most suitable leadership practices for the Maronite Catholic community, it is imperative to fully understand exactly what adaptive leadership is. The

adaptive leadership framework is a result of the over thirty years of research by Harvard fellows, Dr. Robert Heifetz and Marty Linsky. A general definition of adaptive leadership as defined by Heifetz and Linsky is, “the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive” (Grashow, Heifetz, Linsky, 2009).

### **Technical Problems vs. Adaptive Challenges**

One of the many keys to the successful practice of adaptive leadership is properly identifying the challenge(s) present in the social system. Technical problems are often complex and critical (Grashow, Heifetz, Linsky, 2009). An example of a technical problem would be, taking medication to lower cholesterol. Taking medication in order to lower cholesterol is a known and proven solution that can be implemented and supported through the most recent medical sciences. Technical problems can be resolved through the actions of an authoritative expertise (i.e. doctor), and through the organization’s current procedures, structures, and practices. The problem definition of a technical problem is easily identifiable, as well as the solution.

This is stark contrast with adaptive challenges, in which learning and discovery must take place in order to identify the problems and solutions, and the stakeholders must participate in the process or resolving the problems. Adaptive challenges can only be addressed by the stakeholders themselves, the ones who are experiencing the problem. In order for meaningful progress and positive change to take place, the stakeholders must be willing to change their priorities, beliefs, loyalties, and habits. Identifying an adaptive challenge and being an adaptive leader can be an emotional experience, as one must accept that their must be some sort of loss in order to gain the benefits of the actual leadership work. This loss can be habits, relationships,

and/or a change in dynamics, systems, and environments. The leader(s) must be ready to be a positive force for change within their environment, and quite possibly be, “the change”.

It is often possible that a challenging situation that must be solved can be a combination of both a technical problem and adaptive challenge. When a combination of both is present, the problem identifiable, but the solution requires learning and discovery. The combination also combines who is able to enact change towards the desired solutions. In a technical problem and adaptive challenge combination, both the authority figure(s) and stakeholder(s) are involved in solving the technical problem/adaptive challenge (Grashow, Heifetz, Linsky, 2009). The following chart helps distinguish technical problems and adaptive challenges:

Figure 2-1 (Grashow, Heifetz, Linsky, 2009)

<b>Type of Challenge</b>	<b>Problem</b>	<b>Solution</b>	<b>Locus of Work</b>
<b>Technical</b>	Clear	Clear	Authority
<b>Technical and Adaptive</b>	Clear	Requires learning	Authority and stakeholders
<b>Adaptive</b>	Requires learning	Requires learning	Stakeholders

### **The Illusion of the Broken System**

Heifetz and Linsky discuss the, “illusion of the broken system”, which I think is an important topic to discuss in relation to ethno-religious communities, specifically the Maronite Catholic communities. The discussion regarding the illusion of the broken system, is just that; an illusion. Any social system, whether it be a business, church, or family, is a direct product and result of the patterns of actions and attitudes of the individuals involved in that particular system.

A colleague of Heifetz and Linsky, Jeff Lawrence states, “There is no such thing as a dysfunctional organization, because every organization is perfectly aligned to achieve the results it currently gets”. This statement is important to remember when confronting adaptive challenges, as it requires honest assessments of the particular adaptive challenge, in order to identify the root cause of the challenge, the actions leading up to it, and possible solutions that will solicit the best outcome. In addition, this idea takes into account that what one individual might view as a dysfunctional environment or situation, works for the opposite party in the system, and might even be seen as ideal.

The impact of this framework directly lies in the types of techniques for trying to address the problem. In the Maronite Catholic Church, as well as many other religious institutions, the fear of attempting something new and/or directly addressing the problem is fueled by the fear of losing parishioners. Parishioners are what make up the community, and apart from the religion itself, make up the physical church. The importance of the role parishioners is clearly stated in Part One: The Profession of Faith, Section Two: The Profession of the Catholic Faith of the, Catechism of the Catholic Church, which is a summary of the beliefs and traditions of the Catholic Church. In this section it states,

“All men are called to this Catholic unity of the People of God ... and to it, in different ways, belong or are ordered: the Catholic faithful, others who believe in Christ, and finally all mankind, called by God’s grace to salvation” (2000).

The passionate wording in the, Catechism of the Catholic Church, regarding the people that make up both their local church, as well as the global church, points to the reason why confronting some of the adaptive challenges faced by the Catholic Communities can be just that, challenging. Concerning the discussion of the idea of the broken system, fixing said “broken

system” would result in some sort of loss, which often greatly overshadows the potential for meaningful and powerful change. For many individuals involved in the Maronite Community, the changes that might result after the challenge is addressed, would require some sort of loss, causing people to hold onto what they already have and know.

This is why I believe that the adaptive leadership framework and practices would be best for addressing the current challenges facing the Maronite Catholic Church in the United States. Because of both the illusion of the broken system, fear of loss, and resistance to change is such a real motivation of behaviors and attitudes, it is important to assess and address the types of losses that are stake within the environment(s). For example, within the Maronite Church ecosystem, a loss of one’s personal and religious identity is at stake. Adaptive leadership stresses the importance of, “assessing, managing, distributing, and providing contexts for losses that move people through those losses to a new place” (Grashow, Heifetz, Linksy, 2009).

In addition to the presence of the concept of loss within the adaptive leadership framework, conservation is present as well. It is not only important to reflect on what has the potential to be lost, but what are the elements, values, and core competencies that must be sustained and preserved for the future. This element of the adaptive leadership framework is often hard for the stakeholders and acting adaptive leaders, as they are forced to retell and modify the stories that they have been telling themselves and the world regarding their beliefs, values, and what they represent (Grashow, Heifetz, Linksy, 2009).

## **Methods**

In order to be able to identify the adaptive challenges present in the Maronite Catholic Church and communities in the United States, I had to gather and interpret the data that would be most useful for this project. I used, my personal experiences, a ten question anonymous survey

that was posted and shared on my social media platforms, as well as anonymous interviews with members of the Maronite clergy from across the nation, and finally various academic resources and websites. In regards to my personal experience, I have been extremely involved in both my local and national Maronite Catholic community for the last five years, volunteering up to twenty hours a week, sometimes more, within my community. I have served on multiple boards and committees that contribute to both social and religious activities at my parish. I have been president of the MYA at my parish for the last three years, and have led groups of volunteers and parishioners to create and complete meaningful and impactful work within our parish and local community. On a national level, I have been a part of the MYA and MYO board on multiple occasions, assisting in helping plan and execute a variety of events throughout the years. The second factor is based on the responses I have received from over fifty individuals through an anonymous survey that I published. The survey consisted of ten questions, four multiple choice and six short answer. In this short survey, participants were asked to state their age, how often they go to church, what church they normally attend, and who they usually attend church with. The short answer questions asked participants to briefly state what their Maronite parish was doing well and how they could improve in terms of religious and social fulfillment, what issues they think their church should address, and finishing with a free response question. The third factor that has influenced my statement of adaptive challenges is personal interviews that I have given to different members of the Maronite clergy. Though they will remain anonymous in their answers, their insight from the perspective of clergy has greatly influenced my statement of adaptive challenges. The final method of data collection has been through various resources that have been cited throughout the paper.

### **Interpretation**

Now that a clear definition of adaptive challenges has been established, the three adaptive challenges that I believe are present in the Maronite Catholic Churches in the United States can be stated and supported through my methods of data collection.

### **Adaptive Challenge One: Clash of Cultural Dimensions**

The first adaptive challenge I have identified is the clash of cultures. This does not necessarily mean a direct clash between the Lebanese and American culture, in terms of language and/or dress, even though this is present to a certain extent. By clash of cultures, I am implying that there is a clash of the cultural dimensions present in the Lebanese culture, which are in direct and indirect conflict with the cultural dimensions present in the American culture. This clash is due to the merging of the different generations of Lebanese Maronites. In many communities there are three generations of Lebanese Maronites present in the parish. Often times, direct conflict comes from Lebanese Maronites who have emigrated to the United States and first generation, as both struggle to balance and blend the cultural ideals and actions of the Lebanese and American cultures.

This specific adaptive challenge can be addressed through the lense of collectivist and individualist societies, in order to later find a promising solution. Geert Hofstede, the social psychologist who has identified the six dimensions of cultures, gives the following definition of the term, “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others” (Hofstede, 2011). Culture is a collective phenomenon, and can be connected to different collectives simultaneously. For example, the Lebanese culture belongs to a certain collective, those who ascribe to the culture of the country of Lebanon. However, the Lebanese culture collective is simultaneously connected to other collectives as well; such as, the Lebanese Maronite, Lebanese Greek Orthodox, Lebanese Melkite, Lebanese Sunni, Lebanese

Shiite, and Lebanese Druze collective. The listed examples of the different Lebanese religious collectives are all comprised of societal, national, and gender norms within their religious and national framework.

Hofstede identifies six dimensions of culture: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, long term vs. short term orientation, and indulgences vs. restraint. The cultural dimension that will be addressed for this adaptive challenge will be, individualism vs. collectivism. This dimension discusses the degree in which individuals are integrated into groups. According to the cultural dimension scale created by Hofstede, each country rates towards a certain tendency, in this case, to be on either side of the spectrum of individualism or collectivism. Individualist societies tend to have looser ties to relationships. This implies that individualistic societies are expected to firstly look after him/herself and his/her immediate family, with everyone else becoming a second factor. Collectivist societies have tight ties to relationships from birth, which are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, that continue to protect them throughout their lives in exchange for loyalty.

The United States is considered to be an individualist society with a high score of ninety-one on the hundred point scale. This is compared to the relatively low score of Lebanon which is thirty-eight. In the United States, personal achievements and individual rights are just that, personal and individual. Individuals in the United States do not expect others to fulfill their needs, are comfortable with confrontation, and mainly identify as “I”. In the United States, everyone is entitled to their own opinion and their actions are expected to reflect them, and low-context communication is practiced. Low-context communication explains all expectations and happenings. An example of low-context communication practice would be the issuing of written employee contracts. The idea of the “American Dream”, is a great example of the American

individualistic society, as individuals hope for a better quality life and higher standard of living than their parents (“Individualism”,2018).

This exact “American Dream” is what has drawn thousands of immigrants to the United States, including the Lebanese. However, in terms of what fuels the desire of Lebanese immigrants in their pursuit of the, “American Dream” is much different in terms of individualism and collectivism. Because Lebanon scored thirty-eight on the individualism and collectivism spectrum established by Hofstede, it can be confidently stated that the Lebanese society is collectivistic. The Lebanese collectivistic society generally promotes and practices a long-term commitment to the member group, be that immediate or extended family and/or relationships with other individuals. In Lebanese society, everyone takes responsibility for the other members of their group, which creates closely-knit in-groups and out-groups. This is often seen as one of the positive aspects of the Lebanese collectivistic society. However, one of the negative aspects is that collectivist societies also value reputation, and “preserving the family name”, allowing for frequent competition between “tribes” or “other groups”, and increased pressure for success and individual perfection. The use of the word “I” is encouraged to be avoided in place of the use of the word “we”. Lebanese society uses high-context communication, where many things are obvious and/or implied (“Country Comparisons”, 2018). An example of high-context communication would be a verbal employee contract, where expectations and responsibilities are implied and/or made obvious.

It is the conflict between the differences of the above two cultural dimensions that tend to create different types of conflict within Maronite communities, causing the first proposed adaptive challenge. In general, when in any ethnic religious institution or community, the social norms and cultural framework of that ethnicity and country of origin are likely to be heightened.

Individuals tend to hold on tightly to things that they have lost, preserving what little they have left of their original country - memories, food, ideals, etc.. In the case of the Maronite Catholic communities, many parishioners fled the Lebanese Civil War between 1975-1990. What they cling onto is the culture and society that they left during that specific time period. In Civil War Lebanon, and before as well, the Maronite identity was very much a political identity, and that political identity is often times only relevant to the individuals who have lived through the Civil War and/or were directly affected. This political guide that motivates them to be involved in Maronite communities in the United States is now only relevant to that specific demographic, and is different than the religious and social motivations of the other demographics. Clinging to this past framework creates a Maronite identity based on political frameworks of the Lebanese Civil War, that are not necessarily representative of the current Maronite identity of the majority of Maronites in today's Lebanon, and/or the United States.

It is this clinging onto an outdated cultural framework that is in direct and indirect conflict with the Lebanese-American fusion of both cultural dimensions. The fusion of the cultural dimension often times embraces the concept of "I" rather than "We", as individuals often pursue personal fulfillment (socially, professionally, educationally) before considering the impact it might have on their reputation and/or their families. The fusion of cultural dimension prefers clarity in expectations in terms of tasking, but also does not disvalue the importance of maintaining and forming personal relationships.

The Maronite Catholic communities are experiencing the struggles in assimilating the Lebanese, American, and Lebanese-American cultural dimensions together. It has become increasingly hard for individuals who are volunteering their time to work together, when they simply have a different way of doing business. Because all work in the Maronite Catholic

community is volunteer based, the conflict in ideals is a quick deterrent for parishioners. Those who have assimilated more into the American cultural dimension of individualism are bothered by the collectivist attitude of “keeping up with the Jones’”’. Those who are more on the collectivist side of the spectrum value giving work or volunteer tasking to their friends, or those who they have a close relationship with, rather than newcomers or those who are more qualified. In regards to relationships, those who are more inclined to behaving in a way that is most aligned with the collectivist dimension value bringing everyone together in the form of “we”, where as those who are more towards the individualist dimension of the spectrum value bringing the community together in terms of “I”.

### **Adaptive Challenge Two: Lack of Involvement of Young Adults**

The second proposed adaptive challenge facing the Maronite Catholic communities is the lack of involvement of the youth and young adults between the ages of 18-35. This adaptive challenge is something that I can speak to extensively, as well as the anonymous survey. Through my many years of involvement, I have always faced the same challenge; getting individuals between the ages of 18-35 involved. The main reason that I have heard and seen multiple times is that the young Maronite adults of this age demographic do not feel like they have a place in church. This is not to mean that they do not have value or are not welcome in the church. Of course they are welcomed in the church no matter what, and they add value to our community. Their feeling comes from a place of their voice not being heard.

Across the United States, it is uncommon for an individual between the ages of 18-35 to serve on any parish council or committee. If there is a young adult on the parish council or committee it is usually because one of their immediate family members is directly involved in church happenings, and they become involved by association. Young adults often feel like they

are being looked down on due to their age and lack of financial resources. The emphasis on fundraising tends to focus on receiving donations of large amounts, rather than small amounts from all parishioners. This practice tends to leave out many young adults, as they are beginning to establish themselves financially and professionally during this time period.

Many young adults do find themselves involved in their local chapter of MYA (Maronite Young Adults), but do not expand their involvement beyond it. The MYA is seen to be as a separate entity of the church, that does not assimilate with any other organizations present at the parish. This fuels the idea that there is either not a place for them in church decisions, committees, etc., or that their place is very small and limited to a certain amount of people. The involvement of the young adults is important for the survival of the church, as they are quite literally the future. It is important to increase the involvement of the young adults to not only fulfill them through Maronite Catholic Church, but to teach them the important volunteer practices that are necessary in order to keep a church present and running, in order to avoid a disparaging learning curve.

### **Adaptive Challenge Three: Lack of Religious Fulfillment**

As mentioned in detail in previous sections, while the Maronite Catholic theology aligns itself with the Universal Catholic Church, it is the religious and spiritual traditions that differ. The traditions that encompass the Maronite Catholic faith is what makes it unique, and must be understood to create any sort of tie to the specific religious institution. In the anonymous survey, more than fifty percent of the participants stated that their Maronite Catholic parish could improve in one area; religious fulfillment. Many stated that it simply was not enough to go to weekly divine liturgy, as they yearned for more and felt that they lack support in their religious and spiritual journeys. The participants desire to understand their faith, both generally and

specifically to Maronite Catholicism, at a much deeper level than what is provided at weekly liturgy.

The lack of religious fulfillment is the third adaptive challenge. Despite weekly liturgy, there is a noticeable absence of Bible studies, support groups, retreats for singles, married couples, and/or young adults, and in general a lack of dialogue. Many stated that instead of these religious and spiritual activities, there is a much stronger focus on social events and fundraising. From a church planning perspective, many believe that hosting social events will draw people into the community, giving them the opportunity to socialize with people they do not already know, or socialize with people they do know in a different way. This has only been working to a certain extent. According to the answers from the survey, many found the social events to be unappealing and awkward, as they did not have the opportunity to meet these individuals before and form any sort of connection with them.

Because the religious needs of the parishioners are not being met, many find themselves attending Roman Catholic Liturgy. Roman Catholic Churches tend to be much larger in size, with many more resources available to them. This means all of the events and activities that are most likely to provide religious fulfillment are available for that specific community. The unmet needs create a large disconnect with between the Maronite Catholic Church and the parishioners, as suddenly the church is not relevant to their life. In one of my interviews with a Maronite Sister, she stated that many Maronites do not know, “what they are doing and why they are doing it”. The result of this is parishioners who only attend the Maronite Catholic Church for social and/or major life events like weddings and/or baptisms.

Any religion, in this specific case, Maronite Catholicism, is supposed to help its parishioners establish their core values, both religiously and socially. It is supposed to help form

their religious framework, teaching them what to believe and why. Once formed, it should allow dialogue within the church, guiding its parishioners through some of life's toughest situations and current events. Without this sense of religious fulfillment and understanding of the Maronite Catechesis and how to apply their faith to their current life, there is no longer a draw for many to attend the Maronite Catholic Church, thus severing the connection in small increments over time.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Addressing the adaptive challenges facing the Maronite Catholic Churches in the United States through the adaptive leadership framework puts the future of the church in the hands of its members in a practical way. This study highlights the current adaptive challenges presently facing this specific ethnic religious community, and how adaptive leadership can benefit its members in successfully improving and maintaining their respective Maronite Catholic communities both on a local and national level. I think that this leadership framework is the most beneficial due to the delicacy and ever-changing nature of the Maronite communities, as it involves the most vulnerable aspects of one's identity. I am hopeful that the legacy and presence of the Maronite Catholic Church will remain strong in the United States, as well as globally, especially if the members of the church begin to take an active leadership role within their communities, to an extent that is most comfortable for them.

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## VIII. Appendix

### A. Informational Survey

This brief anonymous survey was posted on my various social media platforms, and asked participants to answer the questions to the best of their ability. It was a completely anonymous survey in order to encourage participants to answer truthfully, yielding the most beneficial information. A total of sixty-six individuals completed this survey and answered the following questions:

1. What church do you usually attend?
2. Age?
3. Why do you attend church?
4. Do you attend church with your immediate family?
5. What has deterred you and/or deters you currently from attending religious services at your church?
6. What has deterred you and/or detracts you currently from attending social events at your church?
7. What are some issues that you would like your church to address on a local level? These can be broad topics (i.e. current events) or topics specific to your community.
8. What is your church doing well and what can it improve on in regards to religious fulfillment and social activities?
9. What religious and/or social events would you like your church to host?
10. Please add any additional thoughts

## B. Interview Questions

Interviews were conducted with different members of Maronite clergy from across the United States. They have asked to remain anonymous. The following questions were asked:

1. What do you think needs to be done by the members of the community to strengthen the Maronite Catholic Church and Community in the United States?
2. Do you think that there needs to be a stronger connection to the Maronite Catholic Churches in Lebanon?
3. What can the younger generations do to contribute to the growth and strengthening of the Maronite Catholic Churches and Communities in, The United States?
4. What are common issues you see in your community?

## C. Pitch Deck

The following pitch deck can be used as a reference guide for members of the Maronite Community as they navigate different situations and happening in their respective community.



**WE ARE ALL LEADERS!**

**HOW TO USE ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP  
TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF THE  
MARONITE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN  
THE UNITED STATES**



## **WHAT IS ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP?**

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ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP IS A PRACTICAL LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK WHERE EVERYONE IS INVOLVED. IT HELPS INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS SUCCESSFULLY ADAPT TO CHANGING AND CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENTS. BOTH THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COLLECTIVE ARE INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS, AND TAKE ON THE RESPONSIBILITY TO BRING MEANINGFUL CHANGE.

## ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

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OBSERVE



INTERPRET



INTERVENE

## CHALLENGES THE MARONITE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES IS FACING

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### CLASH OF CULTURES

- Focus on reputation
- "Keeping up with the Jones" mentality
- Lack of acceptance of other "business practices"

### LOW YOUTH PARTICIPATION

- Do not feel valued and/or supported
- Are not encouraged to participate in church-wide events
- Lack of dialogue regarding current events

### LACK OF RELIGIOUS FUFILLMENT

- Lack of resources to provide (extra) religious activities
- Seeking an increase in dialogue regarding Maronite faith and identity

## WHAT THIS MEANS

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- The Maronite Church is experiencing "growing pains" as it further establishes its presence in the United States
- Each challenge is dependent on parish. One must learn and discover the dynamics present at their parish and develop a plan of action accordingly

**THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW. WE ARE  
ALL LEADERS WITHIN OUR CHURCH.**

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#LOVEYOURCHURCH #LOVEYOURCOMMUNITY