

Six ways ARDA can shed light on schools' religious contexts

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The world is rapidly changing, and so is the landscape of theological education. How can schools and their respective constituencies make informed and confident decisions in the midst of such change? Where can they turn to ask thoughtful questions about their religious contexts as well as to resource their students as they engage ministry?

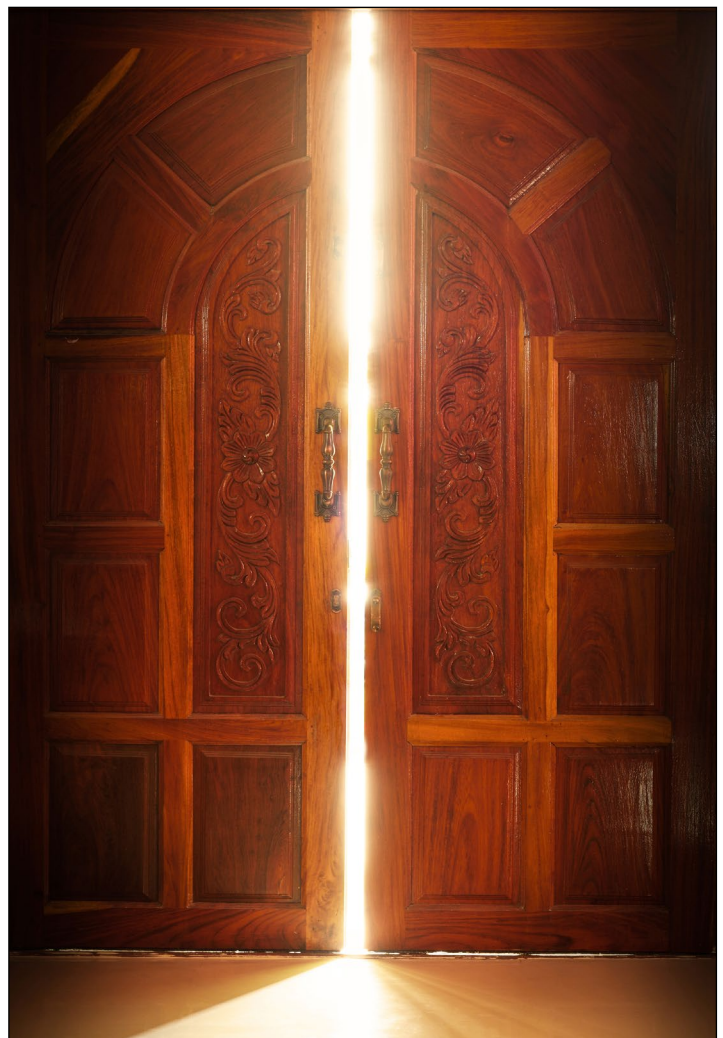
The Association of Theological Schools is collaborating with the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) to increase access to the information and tools that schools need to make decisions and respond to their respective religious contexts. The ARDA is committed to helping schools, educators, students, and religious leaders ask tough questions about their congregations, communities, countries, and world. They are devoted to providing free access to trustworthy data and resources that will allow them to answer their questions easily and accurately.

The ARDA currently offers many free online and interactive resources that can stimulate important conversations. Here are brief descriptions of the six most popular tools:

1. The Community Profile Builder and Guides

The Community Profile Builder assists users in accessing free online information about their communities.

The initial map shows the locations of other congregations in a chosen area using any zip code, city and state, or complete address in the United States. The Profile Builder then provides social, economic, and religious information about the selected community or neighborhood.



These data are drawn from several sources including the US Census and the Religious Congregations and Membership Study. <http://thearda.com/demographicMap/>.

This free online resource has been used by congregational leaders and pastors to gain a data-driven sense of a given congregation's context. These insights have helped many know how best to serve their communities, as well as what types of ministries their congregations might consider starting. For instance, you could answer questions like "Are there a lot of families with young children around my congregation or primarily older adults?" or

5. Compare Members

The Compare Members tool allows users to compare the members of 26 different religious groups in the United States. This resource uses data from the extremely large 2014 US Religious Landscape Survey collected by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. Users can choose up to five different religious groups at one time and run the comparison. The comparison data include demographics, moral attitudes, political attitudes, religious beliefs, and religious practices.

<http://www.thearda.com/denoms/families/members.asp>

6. American Religion Timelines

The ARDA provides nine separate American religion timelines that allow users to explore the most significant people, places, and events in the history of religion in the United States. The “Prominent Religious Events and

People” section provides a thorough overview from the 1600s until today. There are also timelines focused on Baptist, Catholic, Methodist, and Presbyterian events and people. Timelines are also provided for “Social Movements and Religion,” “Religious Minorities (Non-Christians),” “Race/Ethnicity and Religion,” and “Women and Religion.” Each entry contains a description, links to additional timelines, photographs, and sources for further reading. <http://www.thearda.com/timeline/>

The ARDA is so much more than a data archive (although the archive contains more than 1,000 data files!). Users of these resources consistently provide positive feedback about the tools. Take a moment to explore and interact with all of the free online content the ARDA provides—we trust it will ignite your and your students’ interests and become a trusted resource to return to in the future.



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