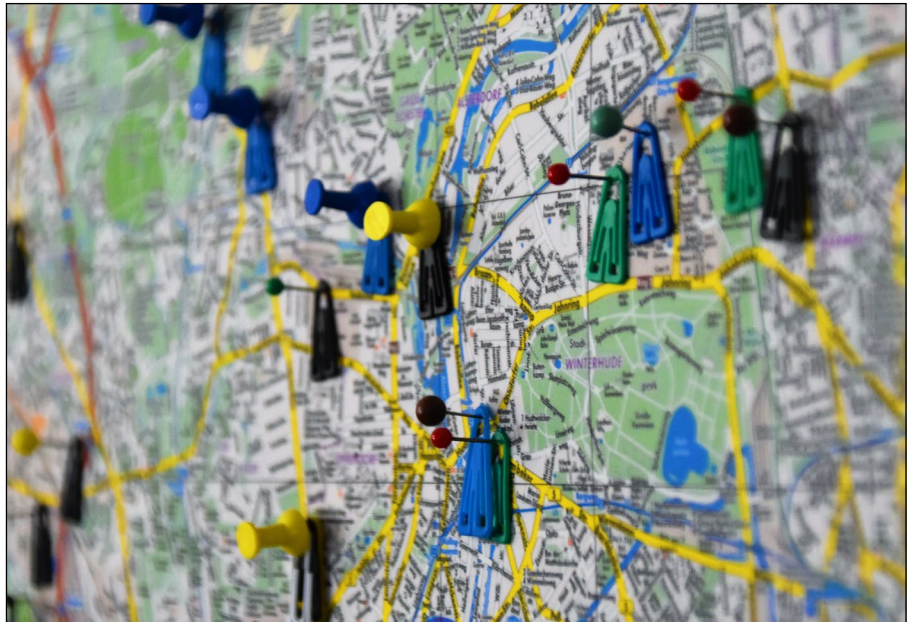


Denominational researchers develop free Community Profile Builder

BY ANDREW WHITEHEAD
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When you think "epiphany," your mind may go to magi, a burning bush, or some other event of biblical proportions. But for Caroline Janeway, her epiphany—of sorts—began at a "lunch-and-learn" on a pleasant spring day in Birmingham, Alabama.



Janeway, associate director of two honors programs at Samford University in Birmingham, had gone to the community seminar to hear about a new demographics tool called the [Community Profile Builder](#). The tool was being offered by the [Association of Religion Data Archives \(ARDA\)](#)—a massive free online resource of religion data used by educators, journalists, religious congregations, and researchers from around the world.

The Community Profile Builder was developed by denominational researchers for the Church of the Nazarene and it assists church and community leaders in accessing free online information about their communities. The initial map shows the location of other churches in your area and the profile builder provides you with social, economic, and religious information on the community or neighborhoods you select.

A guide for the profile builder was first developed by Andrew Whitehead, assistant professor of sociology at Clemson University in South Carolina. Jennifer McClure,

assistant professor of religion at Samford who led the "lunch-and-learn" Janeway attended, updated the guide and has also developed a series of in-depth guides that help users extract even more insight from the data. As with everything else at the [ARDA.com](#), the data and tools are free as part of ARDA's goal to "democratize access to the highest quality data on religion available."

Janeway remembers the event being well-attended by the entire community. "There were a lot of representatives from churches."

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The speaker led the audience through how the Community Profile Builder works. By simply using a zip code or an address, and casting a net on the radius you want to be covered, the software allows you to examine the demographic, religious, and cultural contours of an area along with details about how that area is changing.

Janeway began to think about her Micah 6:8 Fellows students. Micah Fellows is an honors program at Samford in which the participants do volunteer work in the Birmingham community, following the Old Testament exhortation “to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Of the 30 students in the Micah fellows program, only one is from Birmingham. “So they don’t really have a good idea of the Birmingham community,” Janeway said.

It was right about this time during the “lunch-and-learn” that Janeway had an “aha moment.”

By going to the online Community Profile Builder at the ARDA.com, Janeway could create a demographic picture of each neighborhood where a Micah Fellow is volunteering. She could then distill this information onto a single sheet of paper—she is in academics, after all. The more she clicked, the more she found—from information about whether the residents owned or rented their homes to whether they were single parents.

So what good can come from knowing all this?

“Take the students who volunteer at a community medical center,” Janeway explained. “They will start to get answers about questions as simple as why more people are there in the morning than in the afternoon (perhaps because many are single parents and have to come when the children are in school). If they understand the average household has one parent, they’ll know it’s really important to see this person right now because they need to be seen while their child is in school.” Knowing their community, she added, “helps them to get rid of preconceptions” by replacing assumption with fact.

Janeway attended the program on the Community Profile Builder in May of 2017.

“It’s still, for me, pretty new,” she said. “I’m still working on the best ways to impart it.” Her advice to congregation leaders, program heads, and others interested in tapping into this online tool is to “play around with it and click on all the links.”

To build your community’s profile, go to: <http://www.thearda.com/DemographicMap/>



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