

WELS COMMISSION ON CONGREGATIONAL COUNSELING

SELF-ASSESSMENT & ADJUSTMENT PROGRAM (SAA)

What is it?

The SAA program is the core tool of the Commission on Congregational Counseling (CCC). It fulfills the purpose statement of the CCC:

*The Commission on Congregational Counseling assists WELS congregations to **assess** and evaluate ministry, review biblical teachings and principles that impact ministry, develop plans to **adjust** and expand ministry in appropriate ways, and carry out their plans over a period of time.*

The SAA program is used to evaluate a congregation's ministry and community. The congregation does self-analysis to determine health in key areas of ministry. The congregation then decides how they want to adjust ministry, if at all.



Who is it for?

The SAA program is for any congregation that, for whatever reason, wants to evaluate all aspects of congregational life and ministry. This could include:

- Congregations where things are going well and who want some assistance in evaluating the next possible phase of their Kingdom work.
- Congregations that have plateaued and are wondering what they can do to change that.
- Congregations that notice a statistical decline and want to adjust their Gospel ministry in an attempt to turn that around.
- Congregations that haven't done much or any planning for a while and know they need to start.
- Congregations that want to do long-range planning and feel that begins with taking a close look at where they are at now.
- Congregations that have noticed their community has changed and who would like assistance in determining how to appropriately adjust.

- Congregations on the brink of something major in church history: a building expansion, daughtering another church, etc. They want an additional set of eyes looking at all that entails.

What does participation in the SAA program involve?

There are four phases of the SAA program.



Phase 1: Engagement

In this phase the congregation agrees to enroll in the SAA program. They will be introduced to their congregational counselor (CC). They will also be sent three items that they will complete over approximately three months. They are:

1. *The congregational profile.* This profile provides a snapshot of the history of the congregation. It gives past and current statistics. It provides financial information. It lets the congregation see where they have been and where they are now. Much of the information in this form simply requires someone to go through church records. This report also requires a group, such as the church council, to highlight some key events in the history of the church
2. *The community profile.* This profile allows the congregation to study certain aspects of the area they serve with the Gospel. It requires the congregation to set a “target area,” a portion of its community where the congregation would like to direct the most aggressive outreach efforts. The CCC provides a summary of the demographics in that target area. The community profile also requires a small committee to do some survey work of town/city leaders as well as other churches in the area.
3. *The pulse survey.* The pulse survey is an online survey completed by as many of the congregation members as possible. The CCC forwards a link to the congregational leadership. The leadership shares that link with all. The pulse survey consists of three parts.
 - a. *Pulse questions.* These questions capture the overall outlook of the membership, i.e. perceptions of the congregation and its ministry.
 - b. *SWOT analysis.* SWOT analysis looks at strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Strengths and weaknesses are internal – thing within the congregation that could potentially help or hurt ministry efforts. Opportunities and threats are external – things within the community that could help or hurt the mission of the congregation.

- c. *“What I believe.”* These are theological questions that pertain to mission and ministry. They are helpful in letting the congregation leadership plan future Bible study.

In addition to these three items, the congregation provides their congregational counselor with the following:

- The two most recent annual ministry plans, if available
- The two most recent annual budgets
- The two most recent annual financial summaries
- The agenda and minutes for the six most recent church council (or similar) meetings
- The agenda and minutes for the two most recent Voters (or similar) meetings
- The six most recent member newsletters, if available
- Samples of recent worship folders, if used
- Samples of recent outreach materials, if any
- A church history, if one is available

The purpose of providing all this information is twofold. First, in pulling the information together, it allows the congregational leadership to get an accurate view of the state of the congregation over the past few years. Secondly, it allows the congregational counselor to be better informed as he facilitates the discussion that will take place in Phase 2 of the SAA program.

Phase 2: Assessment

This is most likely the only phase where the congregational counselor needs to be on site. He will be there for the two days of the weekend.

On Saturday, the congregational counselor walks a group from your congregation through a study of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. Ideally, this study would be attended by a large percentage of the congregation, certainly all the leadership. The study looks at what Scripture and the Confessions have to say about key areas of ministry: worship, outreach, discipleship, youth ministry (including school if applicable), stewardship, facility, governance, etc.

The goal of the study is to have the congregation be able to complete the following statement: *Based on the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, in our context of ministry for a church to be healthy in the area of (insert any of those areas of ministry) the church would have to...* Thus, the congregation – not the counselor – is defining what a church would do ministry-wise in that community. (The counselor has been trained to facilitate discussion, but the people of the congregation are the “experts” on that community.)

This study takes 6 to 8 hours. The group does the study together and then breaks into smaller groups to apply the Scripture and Confessions to their situation, coming up with a list of key actions/tasks in each of those areas of ministry. At the end of the study, the congregational counselor takes those lists and compiles them.

Sunday after worship, the same group gathers for approximately 90 minutes. The congregational counselor then walks the congregation through the list of what they said a “healthy” church would be doing in their community. The counselor asks them to assess what on that list is currently being done well in their congregation, what is being done but could be done better, and what is not being done at all.

Again, it should therefore be stressed that this is *self*-assessment. The congregation is determining what the criteria for “healthy” ministry would be in their context. The congregation is determining whether or not those criteria are being met. The congregational counselor simply serves as a facilitator. Thanks to the three profiles, he has a good working knowledge of the congregation. Therefore, he can help by asking good questions. If the congregation has questions, the congregational counselor can help by sharing what other WELS congregations have done in similar situations. However ultimately it is the congregation that determines what if anything needs to be adjusted.

With *Phase 2: Assessment* completed, the congregational counselor returns home and begins his work on the next phase.

Phase 3: Adjustment

Within one month of the weekend assessment the congregational counselor provides the congregation with his report. It contains the following.

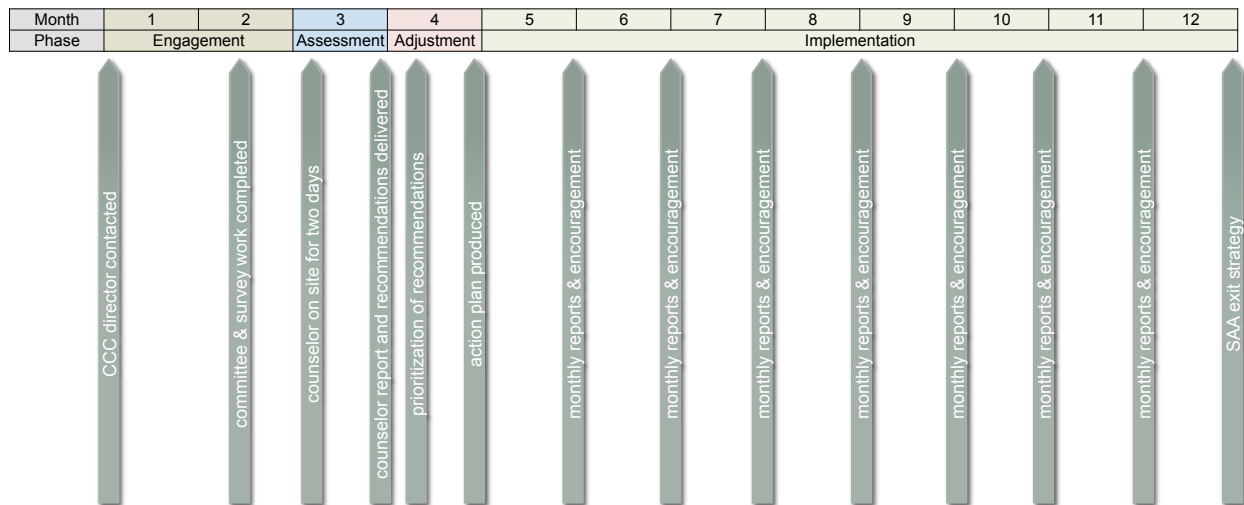
- A summary and analysis of the key information uncovered in the congregational profile.
- A summary and analysis of the key information uncovered in the community profile.
- A summary and analysis of the key information uncovered in the pulse survey.
- A summary of the issues the congregation said needed to be addressed, i.e. the things the congregation said needed to be done to be healthy, but which they ranked as “not being done well” or “not being done at all”.
- A list of resources for addressing those issues – programs, studies, assets and training available from the CCC and the other divisions of the WELS Congregation and Ministry Support Group (CMSG).
- An action plan that sets a timetable for the use of those resources.

The congregational leadership then takes this report and decides which parts of the action plan they wish to implement. This brings the congregation to the final phase of the SAA program.

Phase 4: Implementation

During implementation phase, congregation provides the congregational counselor with monthly reports so that he can monitor progress. The congregational counselor continues to be in contact with congregational leaders, answering any questions that may arise and encouraging them to stay on schedule with the action plan. The implementation schedule is also shared with the District President so that he too might keep the congregation in his prayers and offer encouragement.

The entire program lasts approximately one year.



What are the benefits of the SAA program?

1. In the engagement phase, the congregation gets a comprehensive and accurate view of their ministry and their community.
2. In the assessment phase, faith is fed with an intensive study of the Scripture. Priorities are set for the congregation’s mission.
3. In the adjustment phase, the congregation receives resources that allow them to adjust their Gospel ministry efforts in the way they said they wanted.
4. In the implementation phase, the congregation learns or strengthens the process of conducting ministry according to an action plan.

Thus, going through the SAA program can help a church get into the habit of planning, assessing, and adjusting ministry on an ongoing basis, all to the glory of God.

What is the cost of the SAA program?

The SAA program costs \$500 to \$800, depending on the size of the congregation. The fee covers of the congregational counselor’s transportation and administrative costs. The congregation is also asked to provide lodging to the counselor for the two nights he is on site.

There are other potential additional costs that relate to the adjustment phase. For example, say it is determined that the church should consider purchasing software to manage

discipleship and prospect lists. That would not be covered by the fee. The church would be directed toward a vendor.

FAQs about the SAA program

Q: Why do we need to use a counselor to assess our congregation? Why couldn't our pastor just lead us through the Bible study?

A: We hope that already takes place, i.e. the congregation studies what God's Word has to say about ministry and applies that to their situation. However, sometimes it is helpful to have an outside set of eyes look at one's situation. The counselor has been trained to facilitate discussion. He is also well informed about all the tools and recourses that are available to WELS congregations.

Q: Who are the counselors?

A: Every CCC counselor is a WELS pastor who currently serves in the parish. He faces the same challenges all our congregations face. He can relate.

Q: Where do the resources for the adjustment and implementation phases come from?

A: The resources used in the adjustment and implementation phases have been developed by many different individuals: pastors, teachers, and gifted laypeople.

Q: Is the survey work done anonymously?

A: No. Individuals provide their name and some personal information when they work through the pulse survey. The congregational counselor knows who has said what.

Q: How is our congregational counselor chosen?

A: Our counselors are spread out geographically. Ideally, the CCC director will assign a congregational counselor that is geographically close to you.

Q: What will the counselor do for our school?

A: The counselor is trained to look at certain aspects of your school ministry that pertain to overall congregational health: size of the school (trending up or down), school budget as a percent of overall budget, etc. As a pastor, the counselor is *not* trained to assess things like Lutheran elementary curriculum, teacher staffing issues, etc. If it is determined that such things are affecting congregational health, as part of the adjustment process the congregational counselor will recommend the congregation work with WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools, another division of the WELS Congregation Ministry and Support Group.

Q: *What is the purpose of the monthly reports?*

A: They serve a two-fold purpose. First, they let the counselor see if the congregation is sticking to the action plan so he can provide encouragement or assistance if they are falling behind. Secondly, they let the CCC assess the SAA program, to see if it is benefitting congregations the way we pray it will.

Additional questions?

If you have any additional questions about the SAA program, or if you would like your church to participate in it, please contact the director of the CCC, Jonathan Hein.

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