

SPAS Assembly Report 2026

ENGAGE: Lutherans for Gun Violence Prevention

The MISSION of ENGAGE is to MEDITATE on, EDUCATE about, and ADVOCATE for gun violence prevention in the nonviolent Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Looking back at the measurable goals you set for 2026, how were the goals responded?

Dr. Per Anderson, writer of the new ELCA Statement on Faith and Civic Life, invited Rev. Dr. Ron Letnes, Chair of ENGAGE, to be a consultant in the development of the statement. The statement was approved by the ELCA in Assembly in 2026.

Furthermore, ENGAGE continued to offer a presence, conversation and resources by tabling at the Conference Assembly in February and SPAS Assembly in May. Our ENGAGE website has multiple resources for personal and congregational reference and use. ENGAGE hosts a weekly online SALON conversation to nurture relevant gun violence prevention (GVP) in all life spaces. All are welcome to join the conversation. ENGAGE hosts evening FOCUS sessions to stir a wider audience. Members of the ENGAGE Alert Team (EAT) of over 60 were invited to the conversation. We advocate a trifecta of engagement: theology/values, data and action. Members participate in rallies at the Capitol and are encouraged to write letters and speak with elected officials. ENGAGE connects with leaders of other GVP organizations to coordinate and inform. Finally, ENGAGE authored a GVP resolution at the SPAS Assembly which passed by about 90%. The resolution called for appropriate action.

Looking back, which goals came to fruition?

ALL were accomplished with the exception of congregational invitations to learn, discuss and act for gun violence prevention.

What have you learned that will help you live out your mission in the coming year?

It is significant that the SPAS has been a leader in endorsing GVP and ENGAGE as a Public Witness Work Group. In a survey of 65 ELCA Synods, only TWO had solo standing committees to address GVP: SPAS and Southern California. There is a hesitancy for congregations to lift up GVP and gun safety. Yet, the ELCA in its' General Assembly action has been boldly supportive of GVP action since 1989, consistently passing resolutions in support of GVP. ELCA theology unquestionably supports GVP action. This is consistent with the foundational nonviolent ethic of Jesus Christ.

Gun violence in the Twin Cities and Minnesota remains significant. A leading GVP organization nationally ranks Minnesota #14 in terms of gun law strength and #8 in rate of gun violence. We do well, but we can improve. Last year, nearly 580 Minnesotans died of gun violence. The tragedy at Annunciation School made clear that some types of weapons such as the AR-15 semi-automatic type are meant only for the battlefield and not for general purchase. ENGAGE supports hunting, protection and recreational gun purchase and use. We also support safe storage and similar laws which keep guns safe from tragic use. ENGAGE advocates for such laws.

Goals for 2026-2027 include: 1) Presentations at pastoral conferences to enable trust-building which may lead to congregational presentations; 2) Attending conference gatherings to promote GVP; 3) Sponsoring a resolution; 4) Continue to advocate with state legislators; 5) Work more closely with other GVP organizations such as Brady, Giffords, and Moms Demand Action; 6) Continue to develop resources for personal and congregational use; 7) Grow ELT to include youth and young adults; 8) Continue SALON and FOCUS conversations.

ENGAGE Leadership Team (ELT): Rev. Robert Kriesel, Jon Fogelberg, Rev. John Matthews, Darcy Mackenzie, and Rev. Dr. Ron Letnes (Chair)