

# VIOLA JEAN GARTON

## *Lutheran for Life*

BORN: **MARCH 4, 1929** *Brooklyn, New York*

DIED: **DECEMBER 23, 2016** *Benton, Arkansas*

**J**EAN GARTON WAS ONE OF THE MISSOURI SYNOD'S most prominent advocates for the unborn for more than four decades. The daughter of police officers and the wife of an LCMS clergyman, Garton came to her position on abortion when she found herself pregnant at the age of 40 and considered "terminating" her pregnancy. She had been an advocate of legalizing the procedure, believing it to be a matter of women's "rights." But by thinking about what an abortion actually did, that is, end the life of an unborn child, she realized just how wrong she had been and so devoted her time and talents to the pro-life movement.

In the wake of the Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade* (1973) that mandated the legalization of abortion in every state of the union, Garton represented the Synod in offering testimony before state legislators and congressional committees. Already in 1971, the LCMS had, on the basis of Scripture, declared that human life begins at conception and that the Fifth Commandment protects the unborn. In the years following, the Synod has frequently reaffirmed this position.

In 1977, Synod leaders (J. A. O. Preus, Ralph Bohlmann and Samuel Nafzger) convened a meeting of Lutheran leaders committed to the pro-life cause. Garton was among them. This was a first step toward the creation of Lutherans For Life, a pan-Lutheran organization designed to inform, educate and motivate Lutherans to uphold the God-given value of every human life and to influence society to act in the same way. When it formally began in 1978, Garton became its first president and remained so for 17 years.

Garton spoke frequently to groups large or small and traveled the world over to deliver her message. For five

years, she hosted her own radio program, *Speaking of Life*, and appeared frequently on James Dobson's *Focus on the Family*. She also wrote articles for a variety of publications. Perhaps her best-known work was her book *Who Broke the Baby?* (1979) that showed the misleading nature of pro-abortion rhetoric.

Garton was the first woman to serve on an LCMS board (1969), chaired both the Synod's Task Force on Women (1974–81) and the President's Commission on Women (1984–94), and served two terms on the Synod's Board of Directors.

About six months before her death, she spoke at the National Right to Life prayer breakfast and commented on a question she had once been asked: "Why do you do what you do?" "I do what I do," she said, "because I cannot not do it. I learned from Jesus that Christianity is not a spectator sport."

**For more information about the 175th anniversary of the LCMS, visit [lcms.org/175](http://lcms.org/175).**

### DISCOVER MORE

Jean S. Garton, *Who Broke the Baby?* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1979).

Jean S. Garton, "The Pro-Life Movement in the LCMS: Some Reminiscences," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 77 (2013), pages 337–41.

Jacki Ragan, "Farewell Jean Garton, Farewell My Friend," *National Right to Life News*, January 30, 2017. [www.national-righttolifenews.org/2017/01/farewell-jean-garton-farewell-my-friend/](http://www.national-righttolifenews.org/2017/01/farewell-jean-garton-farewell-my-friend/)



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**ONLY JESUS**  
NO OTHER NAME

– 175 YEARS –



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**LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
MISSOURI SYNOD

