

New SPS Executive Director

(Spring 2016) After serving five years as Executive Director of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Dr. Lois Olena passed the baton at the most recent Annual Meeting of the Society in San Dimas, CA, to incoming Executive Director Dr. Margaret “Peg” English de Alminana.

We caught up with Peg for a brief interview and were able to find out more about her background and interests, as well as her hopes for the Society in the future.



Welcome, Peg. Could you tell us a little bit about yourself?

I work as an assistant professor at the College of Christian Ministries and Religion and teach courses in both Theology and Biblical Studies, although my passion is research in a Pentecostal version of women’s studies that is interdisciplinary. For the most part, nearly all of my work has had this focus. I hold a Ph.D. from the University of Wales at Glyndŵr, two MA’s from Southeastern, and a BA from the University of Pittsburgh.

Before coming to Southeastern, I served as the senior chaplain of women at Orange County Correctional Facility’s Female Detention Center, overseeing a vibrant ministry to more than 3,000 women in crisis annually. There I developed and launched an in-jail, faith-based drug rehabilitation dorm, including the development of corresponding programs and curriculum. I launched and oversaw an inner-city mission for street women at the heart of Orlando’s red-light district.

I started out, not as a Pentecostal at all, but grew up as a Presbyterian, and grew into Pentecostalism. My advent into work was as a journalist, but I later sensed a calling from God to serve his people, and so here I am.

My academic publications include: *Women in Pentecostal and Charismatic Ministry: Informing an Ongoing Gender-Focused Dialogue on the Contributions of Women* (Co-Editor with Lois Olena, Brill, 2016); *Removing the Veil* (2008); “A Biblical Investigation of Matriarchal Structures in Ancient Semitic Life” (*Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, 2016); “Incarcerated Women, Reflections on Their Stories” (*Priscilla Papers*, 2010), nominated for an Evangelical Press Award; and “Reconnecting with the Mystics: Kathryn Kuhlman and the Reshaping of Early Pentecostalism” (*JEPTA*, 2013). In addition, I have been blessed to have written numerous books for others as well as numerous articles and book reviews. I am a fully ordained minister, and I reside in Winter Haven, Florida, with my husband, Marty. We have three grown children and four grandchildren. We also have my special needs sister living with us.

What do you like to do to have fun?

I love watching birds (although I’m not nearly as proficient at it as Ken Archer), and I love gardening. I also enjoy decorating and entertaining (when I have time). For the most part, however, I really enjoy learning and teaching God’s word. That’s fun for me. In fact, research makes me feel a little like a fat lady at a buffet—with lots and lots of choices and opportunities that all seem so interesting! So, I guess that I really just enjoy what I do and have fun doing it.

How long have you been a member of the Society for Pentecostal Studies?

What is your favorite memory or experience from that time? What have you enjoyed most about the Society?

I started attending the Society in 2011. I have really enjoyed the presentations and getting an opportunity to present myself in such a collegial, scholarly atmosphere. One memory that comes to mind is presenting a paper about *Theotokos*, to a packed room of filled predominantly by men who at times seemed to be pelting me with questions. It was one of the first times I had presented, but I was both inspired and intimidated by the enthusiasm for the topic. I think I may have hit a nerve with it, but that is what I love the most: that we can discuss topics we're thinking and praying about in a safe, friendly, affirming environment. I found the experience to be invigorating with respect to the research involved and the ensuing discussion. Hearing from and interacting with such brilliant scholars is always an enriching experience.

The Executive Director position, a five-year term, is an important one for the Society that requires a lot of work. What interested you in the position?

Well, I hadn't really considered it, but I received an email indicating that I had been nominated for it and requesting a response. Quite frankly, it seemed like a great deal of work at first, but I felt challenged by God. I'm such an advocate for women in leadership that it seemed hypocritical to let this meaningful opportunity pass me by simply because I felt intimidated by the enormity of the task. And I'm kind of a work horse, always have been, which has caused me to be good at working hard and accomplishing a lot. After a reasonable time of prayer, I genuinely sensed that God's help would be there, which is why I accepted the position.

What talents and skills do you think are necessary for an effective Executive Director?

Well, I've worked as an editor and writer for most of my adult life, which will help. And, as stated above, I'm used to accomplishing a great deal of work, and this role certainly comes with a lot of it. I've stepped up (with God's help) and successfully tackled some colossal organizational challenges in the past where systems and procedures were vitally important. But most importantly, however, is that I've learned to co-labor with God in what I do. I bring to this challenge a full commitment to prayer and hearing from God in all of my endeavors.

What do you see as some of the strengths of the Society for Pentecostal Studies and what are your hopes for it in the days ahead?

Without doubt, collegiality and respect for all people and for scholarship are notable qualities exhibited by SPS. The Society offers a safe place where young scholars can be mentored by more seasoned ones, and where researchers can 'think out loud' without fear of reprisal. The fellowship and the mutual respect offered to all—even to those who might differ—is a unique feature and a treasure from God that must be nurtured and protected.