

***Book Review***  
***Unlikely***  
**By Kevin Palau (2015)**  
**Howard Books**

**Reviewed by Yvonne S. Smith**  
University of La Verne

This book is recommended as a current, appealing, and unlikely example of living Biblical Integration. It is also recommended for anyone interested in finding effective ways to engage the culture and see it transformed through relationships and loving service.

With unusual transparency, Kevin Palau tells the story of how the churches in Portland, Oregon, work together with the left-leaning progressive city government to serve the citizens of Portland. The churches participate in school clean-up, in academic mentoring, in the foster system, in homeless shelters, and in other services to the community.

The catalyst for this unusual partnership was the Louis Palau Ministries, which is headquartered in Portland. In 2008, Louis Palau, his son Kevin, and a group of key pastors approached the Portland City Council and the openly gay mayor with an unusual question: "What can the churches of Portland do to help the City of Portland? There are no ideological strings to this offer. We live in Portland. We use the parks, we drive on the roads, our kids attend the schools. How can we help?"

The City Council members were impressed by a group that represented large numbers of citizens. They were also impressed because, in a time of tight budgets, the churches were offering to serve the city without compensation. The Council was unsure of the ideological risk but decided to take a chance anyway.

This book is the story of that unusual partnership. It is also an example of a model of ministry that will appeal to the Millennial generation. "When God wanted to show his love for us, he didn't send an email or write an article or post a YouTube video," says Palau, but rather, "He came and lived among us in the person of

Jesus...Bottom line? Physical presence matters" (2015, 165). For Millennials and people from other generations who are disillusioned by the church, this way of living out engagement and service is an excellent example of servant leadership in action.

Not everything in Portland is perfect, and Palau tells the whole story candidly. But the bottom line, he says, is that "we can work together and partner on the issues we are all passionate about without pretending to agree on issues of contention" (2015:62). Palau also talks about impacting the city for Christ. "Relationships are never easy," he says, "Especially challenging, unlikely ones, with people whose values or lifestyle or theology may differ from ours. They require work and cultivation. In our frantically busy world, it's easy to neglect them. But there's no substitute for them in our efforts to build the kingdom...They are not incidental to our mission. They *are* the mission" (2015: 81).

At about 200 pages, this book makes a good supplement for appropriate classes. It is an example of an organic service movement, and it illustrates active servant leadership in a way that will appeal to undergraduates. But what I took away from the book was the encouragement that there is a way to make an impact for Jesus in this culture. It is the old way of setting out to be obedient to Christ, to proclaim his message, to live in unity as his followers, and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Palau, 2015:139).

In every generation, Christ finds ways for his alert followers to follow the mission. *Unlikely* is the story of how a group of churches, aided by the Palau organization, found their way in their city.