

I understand that everyone at Skillman is on edge over the coming merger decision. I've been following the various emails. It's certainly a very difficult choice that is being made, and Skillman isn't the only one's making this choice. I'm sure you have heard that Highland Oaks decided to sell their building to a non-denominational church. Also we have a friend who attends (what used to be) Scofield Memorial Church on Royal and Abrams that just merged with a non-denominational church too. Seems to be the direction many post-war churches are choosing to go. I haven't decided yet if I will be submitting a ballot. Sarah and I are pretty involved now with a new Church plant associated with St. Matthews Episcopal Cathedral, so I'm not sure if it's appropriate now for me to drop my 2¢. But I wanted to share a few thoughts.

My disillusionment with the leadership at Skillman stemmed from a realization that the Elders were always primarily focused on focusing Skillmans mission on a demographic I've come to call "Upper-Middle Class Professionals With Cute Kids" (UMPWiCKs). Admittedly, this is a demographic my family fits into. The problem with this missional demographic is that the Church missions market is oversaturated. There are dozens of Churches of all sizes and denominations in East Dallas fighting to get this demographic in their doors - hundreds if you extend out to all of DFW. And many of those Churches provide spiritual nourishment/entertainment to that demographic far better than Skillman ever has -including the Hills. From that perspective, I think a merger with the Hills will likely have some short-term success. I imagine The Hills can focus better direct marketing efforts to that demographic than Skillman could alone, and "The Hills Dallas" will quickly see a rise in new attendance. I think this is a likely short term outcome.

But this *is* a short term outcome. The Hills Dallas will grow quickly because it is new, but "new" is a very short term asset. If you are lucky, this is going to kick problems down the road about 7-10 years. If you want an example of what you can expect from the merger over the next 10 years, you should take a look at Munger Place as an example. Munger Place was a very similar Methodist-turned non-denom Church plant in an old East Dallas church building. They rose fast attracting lots of young millenials, and now are declining just as quickly again. And this shouldn't be surprising. New is a short term asset.

Skillman will never again be the Church of Christ-themed Country Club it was in the 80's and 90's, and this merger is not going to make it one. The demographic trends for the missional market you are focused on is just not in your favor, and as church affiliation and attendance in America continues to decline the inter-church competition to steal the remaining church-going UMPWiCKs from other churches is going to get fierce and ugly. Side note: At no time while I was at Skillman did I ever hear any minister or elder teach prosperity gospel, but imagine how certain non-denomination churches in Dallas County that *have* regularly preached prosperity gospel are going to react when America's religious institutional decline starts impacting them. The Evangelical church marketplace is going to start getting increasingly desperate and really ugly. And even still, there will always be another new church. As Ben Folds preached, "There's always someone cooler than you."

On the other hand, sometimes the only way to win the game is to not play by their rules. Remember the movie "[Beautiful Mind](#)"? Consider how the movie chauvinistically explained Nashian Economics. In our scenario, UMPWiCKs are the beautiful blonde that everyone fights over. But, there are a lot of other underserved demographics (friends of the beautiful blonde) that aren't UMPWiCKs. For example, I can't personally think of a Church of any

denomination in East Dallas that has a missional focus that caters to families with children with special needs. This is a lot of families that have trouble feeling comfortable going to church because they are concerned that people there won't understand that their kids can't sit still or that their teenager looks and talks weird. These can be good families too that need spiritual and communal support. If Skillman wants to see a long term community grow, then it's going to have to look away from UMPWiCKs and toward their friends.

The good news is that this kind of missional focus can be done regardless of which way the vote goes. Skillman can be a missional church either way. If the merger vote wins then I would love to see the Hills focus their considerable marketing efforts for Skillman away from UMPWiCKs and toward an underserved missional community. Then, over the next decade, whatever church is at Skillman won't be competing for attention from all the other UMPWiCK focused Churches.

I hope this season passes quickly for the Church of Christ Skillman and whatever choice is made God can use the Church of Christ at Skillman to bring people to Him.

Have a good evening.

Love,
Dallas May