

**QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**  
**FROM SKILLMAN TOWN HALL ON APRIL 27, 2020**  
**REGARDING JOINING THE HILLS CHURCH**

(revised 5-11-22)

1. **“Why is all the information that the Elders pass out being phased as though it is already a settled, deal, done, and final?”** (Troy Gibson) In January of this year, the Elders met with the Hills leadership to begin exploring the question of whether by joining together we could more effectively serve the kingdom than we could separately. The elders were encouraged by that conversation and began providing opportunities for Skillman members to get to know the Hills. We also formed an independent advisory committee to investigate the answers to questions from members and to address the topics of Finance, Missions, CDC, Facilities, Staffing, Church Life, and Governance. Had the advisory committee’s report been less than satisfactory, the discussion would have ended. The report was positive and the elders in April began serious negotiations with the Hills, resulting in the Assurances document that was presented at the Town Hall and shared with the congregation. At that point, on April 27, the Elders made the recommendation to the congregation that Skillman join with the Hills. Until the congregation votes on the matter, nothing is final.

If there is a perception that joining with the Hills was already a settled done deal, it is due to two factors. One, we clearly could have done a better job communicating these matters over the past four months. Secondly, there has been a persistent counter narrative that has implied that a deal was done, that has questioned the motives, judgment, and integrity of the elders and of the Hills leadership, and has had a polarizing effect on the congregation.

We are calling the congregation to participate together in 30 days of prayer. We pledge to you to observe these words of Paul from the 2nd chapter of his letter to the Philippians:

*Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*

2. **“Why are all the actions being handled through the Hills, as if they are already in control? ARE THEY?”** (Troy Gibson) Actions are not being handled through the Hills. The Skillman Elders are solely responsible for management of the corporate affairs of this church, and have exercised independence in accordance with Skillman’s bylaws, other governing documents, and Texas law. Like any combination of churches or other organizations, there must be conversations, understanding of each other, and sufficient, common agreement reached on how assets and operations will be handled in the future. -
3. **“Why is the vote the final thing being done , where it should have been the first?”** (Troy Gibson) The vote cannot and should not be taken until the congregation knows exactly what it is voting on. Therefore we have provided information thru the Advisory Committee Report, the Assurances document, and other forums to help people to understand the opportunity and be informed about the vote.
4. **“If John Mark (Davidson) has ideas that would grow/expand our church, why haven't they been implemented before now?”** (Blaine Armstrong) As Skillman’s senior pulpit minister, John Mark did present ideas that might have grown/expanded our church. During the course of his tenure many of these were implemented; while others languished because of a lack of consensus.

5. **“If the desires of each of the three Skillman Elders are to join The Hills, why have you not left Skillman months ago, and placed membership there, rather than remaining, and insisting and asserting your authority (ignoring other alternatives) by requiring a divisive and destructive vote on the dissolution and 'Giveaway' of our Congregation?”** (Mark Prude) It is no secret the membership at Skillman has been declining, and with that decline has come declining financial resources. The Elders are not interested in being among those that merely disappear but instead are interested in leading the church to a place that is sustainable for years to come. The Skillman Elders have been very deliberate over the past four months to fully explore this recommendation to join with The Hills. Despite questions like this and others on our integrity, authority and resolve, we press forward in recognition that Skillman’s bylaws expressly require a member vote on this opportunity. As now seen in the binding “Assurances” agreement between Skillman and The Hills there is no “giveaway”, and the Skillman Elders recommendation is firmly rooted in and will advance the mission and build upon the heritage of this church.
6. **“If we vote down a merger with The Hills Church, what is the alternative?”** (Dan Blucker) Several alternatives have been presented and separately considered by the Skillman Elders. We are preparing a further response to each of these alternatives and will share with all Skillman members in the days ahead.
7. **“We have failed to reverse the trend so far, so how can we anticipate any success or even effort to adapt to changing expectations on our own?”** (Dan Blucker) Skillman’s membership trends and financial trends are significant concerns, as detailed in presentations by Shane Calvin and Ken Teague at the Town Hall meeting. The Hills has received interest from well over 100 families in Dallas County for a new campus. The membership trend is very likely to be reversed and turn upward based on this and The Hills past experience with opening new campuses.
8. **“Will children under 18 be allowed to vote? (My understanding is that they were in Elder nominations)”** (Lorna Griffin) A determination of who is an eligible voter on Skillman joining with The Hills Church of Christ, to cast one vote, has been made by the Elders in reliance upon Skillman’s governing documents and a reasonable, supplemental list of criteria. Eligible voters on this proposal are individuals who satisfy all four of the following criteria:
  - a. Has been baptized by immersion upon their oral or written confession of faith in Jesus Christ;
  - b. Has placed their membership with Skillman Church of Christ;
  - c. Such membership remains in effect as reflected by one or more of the following: member oral and/or written statements; attendance to Bible class or worship services; contributions of time, property or money to the church; notice from the individual of a new address; past personal discussions, correspondence, phone calls or other knowledge or belief of the Skillman Elders regarding continued membership at Skillman; and/or lack of any other evidence of an intent to move membership to another church; and
  - d. As of the date the vote is cast, is of sound mind.

Following substantial discussion, the Elders determined to not place an age limit on membership and thus eligibility to vote. Parents are encouraged to respect the integrity of this process, including the right to secret ballot, and allow children to vote only if they feel their child is capable of such an independent decision, rather than simply requesting or requiring such children to vote as a parent votes. It is true that children voted in the last Elder nominations.

9. **“Will staff vote, as this might be a conflict of interest regarding their employment?”** (Lorna Griffin) All current, full-time employees on the Skillman staff are members of Skillman. So, like other members, they have the option to vote yes, no or abstain.
10. **“I understand that the person who started the opposition to the merger with The Hills has a Plan B in mind to be executed a few years down the road: to sell the property and donate the funds to some charitable group. Is this true?”** (Glenda Houser) It is true that some have suggested that

Skillman property and other assets be sold so that a remnant of our congregation can go start another church in another location. Your Elders have rejected that suggestion and believe The Hills opportunity presents the best path towards building upon Skillman's legacy at this location and revitalizing our presence in this community.

- 11. "How will the Skillman members be selected for the shepherding plan?"** (Kathleen Williamson) Skillman members selected for the initial shepherding plan should be able to satisfy all requirements to eventually be ordained as an elder at The Hills. Significant commitments of time will be expected during this transition and going forward for campus representatives, including engaging with other current elders and leadership at The Hills to get acquainted and see what their gifts are and what they aspire to. While there is provision in the Assurances document to address this topic as a priority, the specifics of how this process will occur will be worked on after closing.
- 12. "How does this proposal differ from the plan John Mark presented to the elders near the end of his employment at Skillman?"** (Kathleen Williamson) John Mark's proposal is an expanded version of the plan presented near the end of his employment at Skillman. The main similarity was the proposal for two services – one traditional and one more participatory. Within the context of reuniting in person after being forced into isolation by the pandemic, with a congregation of 100 or fewer Sunday attendees, splitting the congregation to provide different worship experiences seemed less than optimum.