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The Church of the Good Shepherd

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Dear Helen Hoyt, Dr. Harbour, and Dr. Cole,

I want to express my sincere appreciation to you for this opportunity to respond regarding the evacuation planning. So that you may know a little about my perspective, allow me to give a brief description of myself. I am the Senior Pastor of a 1500-member congregation in the evacuation area. Having been awarded a Doctor of Ministry Degree in Pastoral Care after extensive study, I have the opportunity to do considerable family counseling. I reside in Lower Pottsgrove Township, only a few miles from the nuclear power plant. Our three children will all be in schools which will need to be evacuated. A large portion of my members are living and working within the evacuation area. At the time of the Three Mile Island accident, I was serving a church just outside York, Pa., and therefore I experienced how people reacted at that time.

Therefore, it is from my education in pastoral care, my experience with people in this area and in York, Pa., at the time of the Three Mile Island accident, and my deep personal concern for my family, my congregation and my community that I come to the conclusion that the evacuation would be far from adequate.

My first concern is that people who are a part of the evacuation process may not report for their positions. In fact, some have told me that their intention is to pack up and get out of the area themselves.

Secondly, the assumption that the public would act in an orderly fashion goes against all of my experience with people. To assume that people will not act for themselves in accordance with their own self interest but instead will follow a pre-conceived plan is absurd. Even if the public would remember what the evacuation plan was, few people would follow it. At the height of the 3-Mile Island accident, a couple from my church in York were at a church camp near State College. Although they were in a safe location, they drove back to York, driving past the Three Mile Island plant to come back and rescue their dog. In my own neighborhood within hours after the accident many families involved in the nuclear energy field left their homes. Others in our community would not leave their home even if an evacuation were ordered. To assume that people will act in a crisis situation in the ways pre-determined by an overall plan is, in my opinion, totally absurd and against human nature.

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Thirdly, there are not enough buses in the school districts involved to transport all the students to safe locations in one run. To assume that in the middle of a busy day one could contact drivers from other districts and that they would leave their employment or activities to risk driving into an area of danger is to make some very large assumptions which I think are unsupportable.

Fourth, the assumption that in the event of an accident there would be adequate time to deal with numerous variables is based on trust that those involved: (a) know what is going on within the reactor, and (b) will make decisions regarding evacuation in the public interest. There is no question that the people at Three Mile Island did not really know what was occurring in the reactor (or if they did know that it was within the 200° of meltdown they were not acting in the public interest by not calling for an evacuation). To trust a company to make decisions purely in the public interest when corporations are structured for preserving their own self interest goes against our everyday experience. It is in the interest of all involved with nuclear energy to delay calling for an evacuation even though the crisis management team is struggling with inadequate formation.

In summary, allow me to restate why I believe evacuation would be impractical. First, some key people directly responsible in assisting with the evacuation of the public may not report. Instead they will depart with their own families. Second, I do not believe the public will remember or follow the pre-conceived plan. When frightened and with the noise of a screaming siren still ringing in their ears, people act in unpredictable ways. Third, I believe that the plan to take my children and the children of our community to safety is unworkable given the number of buses available. Although I confess an inadequate knowledge of the availability of ambulances in our area, it seems to me that there will also be inadequate transportation from Pottstown Memorial Medical Center, our communities nursing homes; and the many people alone and shut-in within their own homes. Fourth, even taking into account the technological advancements made since Three Mile Island, I do not believe that those operating the plant can tell what is happening in the countless scenarios which are possible. Therefore, there is much room for inaccurate assessment of the status of the danger, and thus incorrect decisions may be made in determining the correct time to call for an evacuation.

It is my hope that you will give thoughtful considerations to my concerns and deny the issuance of an operating license for Limerick. On paper the plans may look OK, but please consider realistically the way humans act and respond. Thank you again for hearing my concern.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. M. Bruce Irwin

P.S. I write as a concerned citizen and am not a part of any of the local groups.