Misconduct allegation preceded disappearance

By Wayne Laepple May 28, 2009

LEWISBURG — An official of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference said Wednesday allegations of misconduct on the part of a popular Hispanic pastor were turned over to state police at Milton prior to his disappearance a week ago.

Matt Burrows, public information officer for the Milton state police, issued a terse “No comment” when asked about the nature of the allegations against Pastor Jose “Joe” Rosa.

Joanne Dietzel, conference coordinator at conference headquarters in Lancaster, would not describe the allegations further, stating only that church officials are cooperating with police investigators. She would not say whether the allegations came from a member of the congregation or from conference officials.

Rosa, 52, disappeared last Thursday. He was last seen around 11 a.m. by a neighbor who saw him walking toward the Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary from his home at 1104 Sabra Way in Kelly Township. He was not reported missing until Sunday.

On Tuesday, mounted state troopers searched the area near Kelly Elementary School on Hospital Drive as well as wooded areas nearby. They also searched a portion of the federal prison property. No sign of Rosa was found.

“We are cooperating with them as they investigate this matter,” said Dietzel in a prepared statement. “We ask for prayers of believers in the community that the mercy and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ will be experienced by all in this difficult situation.”

Dietzel did confirm that Adalberto Santiago, an associate pastor at the New Columbia church, was named lead pastor on Sunday.

“This transition was planned,” she said. “Joe had been church planting several new congregations and the workload was becoming too much.”

Rosa and his wife came to the Valley from Lancaster County in 2002 to start the Hispanic

congregation and they moved to the home in Kelly Township about two years ago. Rosa and his congregation organized the Fiesta de Mayo celebration in Milton earlier this month.