Church accused missing minister

By Wayne Laepple and Rick Dandes May 29, 2009

The Rev. Jose Rosa

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LEWISBURG — The wife of a missing Lewisburg area pastor stood inside the doorway of her home late Wednesday afternoon, four days after she reported his disappearance, looking tired, stressed and sad.

“We’re hanging in there,” Maggie Rosa said. “This has been a very, very difficult time.”

Mrs. Rosa declined to answer questions about the disappearance of her husband, the Rev. Jose “Joe” Rosa, who was last seen May 21, just after allegations of misconduct were lodged with Milton state police against him by the Lancaster Mennonite Conference, which oversees his Congregacion Menonita Shalom in New Columbia.

Matt Burrows, public information officer for the Milton state police, issued a terse “no comment” Wednesday when asked about the allegations.

Another state police trooper also declined comment later Wednesday.

Joanne Dietzel, conference coordinator at Lancaster Mennonite headquarters, would not describe the allegations, stating only that church officials are cooperating with police.

She would not say whether the allegations came from a congregant or from conference officials.

State police obtained a search warrant Wednesday for the Rosa home, but it had not been executed as of the end of the day, according to District Judge Leo S. Armbruster in Lewisburg.

Rosa, 52, was last seen around 11 a.m. May 21 by a neighbor who saw him walking away from his home at 1104 Sabra Way, in Kelly Township, and toward the Federal Penitentiary at Lewisburg. His disappearance was reported Saturday night.

On Tuesday, mounted state troopers searched the area near Kelly Elementary School on Hospital Drive, as well as nearby wooded areas. 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,” Dietzel said 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 confirmed that Adalberto Santiago, an associate pastor at the New Columbia church, was named pastor 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. 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.