# Missing minister faces charges

By Marcia Moore  Jun 11, 2009

Pastor Jose "Joe" Rosa

The Daily Item, Sunbury, PA

MILTON — An arrest warrant has been issued for the missing Rev. Jose “Joe” Rosa, alleging he had indecent sexual contact with two boys at his Valley home and at Congregacion Menonita Shalom Church in New Columbia, state police at Milton said Wednesday.

A cloud of suspicion has hung over Rosa, 52, of 1104 Sabra Way in Kelly Township, Union County, since his disappearance May 21.

“We don’t know (Rosa’s whereabouts), but we have to move this along,” trooper Matt Burrows said of the filing of criminal charges.

Court documents filed by trooper Patrick Beaver provide some insight into the events that led to a warrant being issued for the pastor's arrest.

They show that Rosa was reported missing only minutes after a high-ranking church official informed state police about the alleged sexual abuse.

It was 8 p.m. Saturday, May 23, when Bishop Samuel Lopez, administrator of the Spanish Mennonite Council of Churches that oversees Congregacion Menonita Shalom Church, told police the council had received a letter from a young male, a former church member who had since returned to Puerto Rico, claiming Rosa had touched him inappropriately, court documents said.

Lopez also provided police a list of individuals and contact information for people who could "likely provide more details regarding this and other complaints against Rosa," the complaint said.

At 9:30 that same night, just after police received the complaint from Lopez, Rosa's wife, Maggie, reported her husband was missing and hadn't been seen in two days.

There has been no sign of Rosa since he was last seen by a neighbor around 11 a.m. May 21, walking from his home toward the U.S. Penitentiary at Lewisburg, police said.

Trooper Beaver said in court documents that he was unable to contact the boy who wrote the accusatory letter because he had left for Puerto Rico.

However, Beaver did interview two other boys, both 14, who claim they were sexually abused by Rosa after moving in temporarily with his family at 1104 Sabra Way in 2005.

The alleged victims, 9 and 10 in 2005, described a similar scenario of being touched inappropriately and being pressured to sleep in the same bed as Rosa at his home.

The younger boy said Rosa kissed him on the lips and grabbed his buttocks inside the church. The abuse ended early this year when his family stopped attending the church, court documents said.

The other boy said he and his family lived in the Rosa home for two months in 2005, and during the next two years, Rosa touched his genitals on 10 or more occasions whenever they were alone in the house.

Rosa was a pastor in Lancaster before moving to the Valley seven years ago to take over as spiritual leader at Congregacion Menonita Shalom Church.

Anyone who believes he may have been a victim of indecent or inappropriate physical contact by Rosa is asked to call state police at Milton at 524-2662.

Anyone with information about Rosa's whereabouts is also asked to call the police.

Rosa is charged with two counts each of felony indecent assault and endangering the welfare of children; three counts of misdemeanor indecent assault and four counts of corruption of minors.

"We're very saddened to learn of the allegations," said Joanne Dietzel, coordinator of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference, which has 16,000 members.

Citing the ongoing criminal investigation, she wouldn't say when church leaders first learned of the allegations against Rosa.

Before any accusation was levied against Rosa, who is believed to be a native of Puerto Rico, the minister had decided on his own to leave the New Columbia church to oversee two new congregations within the conference, Dietzel said.

Although police said in court documents that Lopez told them Rosa had been asked to resign his position when the allegations came to light, Dietzel said that was not the case.

Rosa apparently disappeared very soon after the sexual misconduct claims arose because Dietzel confirmed that his credentials as a church leader would have been suspended pending an investigation.