Cops halt search

Wayne Laepple May 27, 2009

By Wayne Laepple

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LEWISBURG — A search for a missing Union County pastor was suspended at 3 p.m. Tuesday and may not be resumed, a state police spokesman said.

Trooper Matt Burrows, community service officer, said late Tuesday afternoon the search, conducted by state troopers mounted on horseback, had turned up no clues in the disappearance of the Rev. Jose "Joe" Rosa, who was last seen six days ago. The search was concentrated near Hospital Drive in an area of fields and scrub brush bordering federal penitentiary property.

Rosa, 52, was seen by a neighbor around 11 a.m. May 21 near his home at 1104 Sabra Way, Kelly Township. He was wearing shorts and sneakers and carrying a backpack and walking toward the Federal Penitentiary at Lewisburg, not far from Kelly Elementary School on Hospital Drive.

Rosa and his wife, Maggie, were co-pastors of Congregacion Menonita Shalom in New Columbia, which they helped to found in 2002. Attempts to contact Maggie Rosa Tuesday were unsuccessful.

Chad Cohrs, a member of Community Mennonite Fellowship in Milton, which sponsors the New Columbia congregation, on Tuesday said Rosa's disappearance remains a mystery.

Cohrs said the Spanish Mennonite Council appointed a new pastor to the New Columbia church on Sunday, but that was not connected to Rosa's disappearance.

"They had planned to transition leadership, since Joe was starting another congregation," Cohrs said. The change in pastors was to have taken place in June, so the process was accelerated when Rosa disappeared, Cohrs said.

Cohrs said he did not know the name of the new pastor.

Rosa, his wife and family moved to the Valley from Lancaster County in 2002 to start the Mennonite Hispanic congregation, and Rosa was a missionary for the Eastern Mennonite Conference in Lancaster.

"We're concerned and worried about Joe," Cohrs said. "Our congregation continues to support their congregation and the Rosa family."