

‘God Squad’ logo may change, but priest’s mission remains the same

ST. FRANCIS, Wis. – Two years ago, Father Luke Strand, then a deacon in his last year of studies to become a priest of the Milwaukee Archdiocese, came into the spotlight for his unusual looking car.

Riding around town in a black Volkswagen Beetle with a Roman collar painted on the hood, a “God Squad” logo on the sides, and a personalized license plate GODLVYA proudly proclaiming his mission, he attracted attention on the roads.

The car, along with his laid-back nature and outgoing personality, sparked faith-filled conversations with friends and strangers alike.

Now an associate pastor at Holy Family Parish in Fond du Lac, Father Strand is again in the public eye for his God Squad vehicle: The logo is too similar to Best Buy’s Geek Squad trademark.

In mid-August, Father Strand received a letter from the Minnesota-based consumer electronics company requesting that he “cease-and-desist” his God Squad logo, because of copyright infringement.

The shape of the logo, font and colors, all on a black Volkswagen Beetle, were too similar to their well-known Geek Squad cars, according to the complaint sent through the company’s legal department.

Whether it’s television, newspapers, talk radio or Internet message boards, Father Strand has garnered national attention. Many compare his situation to that of David and Goliath, in which the young priest is pitted against a greedy corporation and its lawyers. Father Strand, however, doesn’t see it that way.

For now, Father Strand, who consulted a lawyer about his case, has removed the decals from his car and will redesign the God Squad logo. While he is grateful that people care so much about his public legal situation, he feels that many are making this out to be a bigger deal than it is.

"I was surprised," Father Strand said in an interview with the Catholic Herald, Milwaukee's archdiocesan newspaper recalling when he first opened the letter from Best Buy. "Obviously, I didn't expect it."

After consulting with a lawyer, he took the logo off his car.

"We were really using the car as a way to bring the Gospel message to the streets," he explained. "To develop relationships with people and spark conversations with people, and offer them an opportunity to approach someone from the church and maybe talk about what's going on in their life."

"I just found it to be a phenomenal opportunity to really spark those conversations with people who might be questioning their life, want to talk a little about where they are in their relationship with God," he added.

A statement released by Best Buy's public relations department stated: "As a matter of practice, Best Buy aggressively defends all of our trademarks, including the Geek Squad logo."

"We sent a notification letter to Fr. Strand and God Squad because of the unfortunate similarities between their logo and ours. This was a really difficult thing for us to do because we appreciate what Fr. Strand is trying to accomplish with his mission," it read.

"But at the end of the day, it's bad precedent to let some groups violate our trademark while pursuing others. We're now working closely with Fr. Strand's organization to modify the God Squad logo so that it still works for him and yet doesn't violate the Geek Squad logo. We're confident that together we'll come up with a good (dare we say heavenly?) solution for everyone."

Throughout the two years he has been driving the God Squad car, conversations with curious onlookers taught him that it wasn't the car that mattered, but his easygoing approach that truly struck a chord, according to Rhea Behlke, director of stewardship at Holy Family Parish.

"It wasn't really the logo itself or the type of car itself that was important as much as the fact that it provided people an opening to talk about their faith, or to approach a

priest when they might not otherwise do so. He would like to find a way to be continually creative in bringing the Gospel to the streets,” she explained.

Although Father Strand will have to go without his logo until a new one can be redesigned, he is adamant that his mission – uniquely recognizable on the streets or not – will continue.

“The new evangelization is not about one car with God Squad written on it, but really about leading people to an encounter with Jesus, and that’s what we’re about as priests, what we are about as Catholics, the church, and that’s where I want to put my time and energy,” he said.