

SUFFERS FROM DIABETES, DOCTOR SAYS

Priest Is Cleared Of 9 Traffic Charges

Nine traffic charges filed against the Rev. Howard Thomas Litts, 3774 Manatee Drive SE., were dismissed in St. Petersburg Municipal Court yesterday after a doctor testified the priest suffered from diabetes.

Litts, 42, had been charged with driving while under the influence of intoxicants and eight other related offenses following a series of accidents on July 8.

THE SHORT and stocky priest, who is absent on leave from a diocese in Ohio, sat patiently in the back of the almost empty courtroom yesterday morning and listened to his attorney, Eli Jenkins, present his defense. Litts was not called upon for testimony during the two-and-a-half-hour trial.

Dr. Thomas M. Quehl, a St. Petersburg physician for 10 years, testified that Father Litts, a former patient, was "and certainly still is" a diabetic.

"Diabetic acidosis has symptoms of disorientation and inconsistent behavior," Quehl said, adding that "it is extremely difficult to distinguish a diabetic attack from drunkenness."

HE ALSO said that it would be quite possible for a diabetic to have such an attack, be involved in a series of automobile accidents, and not know what he had done.

Arresting officers testified they could not tell the difference between a diabetic attack and drunkenness, but they had "noticed a strong odor of liquor on the defendant's breath" when they arrested Litts at his home.

They also said that Litts told them he was not aware of any accidents and all he wanted to do was "write his 6 o'clock sermon" for the following day.

JENKINS said, "Other witnesses saw the defendant enter his home after the accidents, but there were at least 10 minutes before the arresting officers arrived, during which time he (Litts) could have had many drinks."

"But no one can actually say he was under the influence of liquor while he was driving," the attorney added.

City Prosecutor George Osborne's request to submit a sample of Litts' blood was refused because it was extracted after what Associate Municipal

Judge George S. Saltsman says you can't tell the difference between an attack and drunkenness."

IN DROPPING the charges, Saltsman commented, "We can't convict a known diabetic (Litts) could have done many when a respectable physician thing."

"If he had been arrested in his car immediately after the accidents and liquor was noticed on his breath, then that might have been a different question," Saltsman concluded.