

# Grim Night of Church Arsons

## New York

A 56-year-old man was charged with setting fire to three Manhattan churches yesterday after a nightlong spree that left a priest dead.

The suspect, Gordon E. Marais, had been released from a federal mental hospital only last Friday on a court order.

Marais, a thin, short man with graying hair who had reportedly had a history of mental disorders, was arrested yesterday after a man later identified as Marais, called news media several times and took responsibility for the fires, which he said were part of a personal vendetta against the Catholic Church.

In the telephone calls, the caller identified himself as "Zodiac," the name used by the killer of at least six persons in California — one in Riverside in 1966 and five in Northern California over a 10-month period that began in December, 1968.

Federal sources said they doubted he was the "Zodiac" killer.

Marais was arrested as he was found crouching near a fourth church.

The Rev. Thomas Smith, 67, died of smoke inhalation in the first blaze, a three-alarm fire which broke out Monday night in the century-old rectory of St. Vincent Ferrer church at 65th street and Lexington avenue.

Marais came to the attention of authorities in July

after a bizarre series of contacts with United Press International, in which he said he had stolen a Greyhound bus, was a Secret Service agent on loan to the CIA, and was going to break into a foreign embassy.

Marais was picked up by Secret Service agents on July 17 and then turned over to local Washington police after it was discovered that California authorities had a fugitive warrant out for him.

At an extradition hearing July 18, his behavior again appeared "rather bizarre," according to a spokesman at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, a federal mental institution where he was confined for more than a week.

"He was saying he was going to break into the Russian embassy or the White House or something like that," the spokesman said.

District of Columbia Superior Court Judge Alfred Burkha ordered him committed to St. Elizabeth's, but last Friday Marais was ordered released by Superior Court Judge Paul F. McArdel after California authorities said they would not prosecute.

Police believe Marais was the man who telephoned UPI and the New York News Monday night and early yesterday, vowing to set churches ablaze in a war against the Catholic Church. Two of the fires were at Catholic churches and the third was an Episcopalian church.

United Press