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Later in the day, he backtracked, saying rather that he had had suspicions and might have been told that certain men were gay. He made it clear that it was a private matter that he did not pursue.

The important thing is not whether McCain can spot gay people but what he does about it, said Rich Tafel, executive director of Log Cabin Republicans, a gay GOP group. "I think we all have thoughts about people beyond what we know. When it leads to discrimination, that's wrong."

Yes to gay jurors

SANTA ANA, Calif. — Jury duty shouldn't depend on someone's sexuality, says a California appeals court.

The court says jurors cannot be excluded simply because they are gay and cannot be asked by lawyers about their sexual orientation.

Rulings dating from 1978 have banned discrimination against jurors based on race and gender because of a defendant's right to a jury chosen from a cross-section of society. The same right bans discrimination based on sexual orientation, the 4th District Court of Appeal said Monday.

The court said gays and lesbians meet the standard of past rulings: a definable group with a common, unique perspective, based on its status in society.

"It cannot seriously be argued in this era of 'don't ask, don't tell' that homosexuals do not have a common perspective," Justice William Bedsworth said in the 3-0 ruling. "They share a history of persecution comparable to that blacks and women share."

HIV segregation

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court is allowing segregation of prison inmates with AIDS.

The court declined to take a case from Alabama where inmates argued that the policy violated the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The justices were told that only Mississippi and South Carolina similarly require such extensive segregation of HIV-positive inmates.

"It's unsettling that no one with the power to influence Alabama's prison policy — including the Alabama Legislature and all branches of the federal government — is willing to address this total undermining of the ADA's language and intent," said Catherine Hanssens of the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund.

Hate and freedom

LAGUNA BEACH, Calif. — An interesting debate has erupted in southern California about free speech and potential hate crimes.

It began with a homophobic remark — dirty words yelled out a car window as William Petrasich walked along a street in Southern California.

When he told police, Petrasich was turned away. No crime committed, they said.

So he took his case public in a letter-writing campaign.

The result is a new police policy of documenting hate speech even when no crime is committed. The policy has ignited a debate about free speech in this Orange County oceanside resort community.

"When the government starts to record what people say, is your speech really free?" said Peter Eliasberg of the American Civil Liberties Union in Los Angeles. "If the speech is protected, the government has no business of keeping track of it. They are trampling on the Constitution."

But those who have been targeted by such remarks say it's a matter of safety and being able to walk the streets without fear of harassment.

"I respect the First Amendment, but I also have a right to be free of verbal

assault," said Petrasich, an attorney at 20th Century Fox studios. He is also gay.

Drugs slow AIDS spread

SAN FRANCISCO — Protease inhibitors have not only been vastly successful in saving lives, but also appear to be slowing the spread of AIDS.

But health experts worry this victory will be wiped out by a new complacency among those at risk.

Protease inhibitors and other drugs have changed AIDS from a death sentence to a treatable chronic disease over the past four years. In the process, they lower people's virus levels dramatically, often to the point where the virus cannot be detected on the most sensitive tests.

Doctors have speculated that since many people have vastly lower virus levels in their bodies, they are also probably less likely to pass the virus on to others through sex.

Indirect evidence of this was made public at the 7th Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections.

Oral risks

SAN FRANCISCO — There are new health concerns about oral sex.

Scientists say oral sex appears to be a surprisingly frequent way of spreading AIDS.

A study found that oral sex

was probably the cause of 8 percent of recent HIV infections among a group of gay men examined in San Francisco.

In the past, there have been occasional reports of people apparently catching HIV orally. But health investigators have had difficulty being certain, since gay men who have oral sex also may engage in other, riskier sex practices, such as anal intercourse.

Now diagnostic tests allow doctors to narrow down the timing of HIV infections. They were used in the latest study, described as the most definitive on the subject to date.

The work was conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the University of California at San Francisco, and was presented in San Francisco at a scientific conference.

RC AIDS crisis

KANSAS CITY — The Roman Catholic Church is being forced to confront the AIDS crisis right at home.

Priests in the United States are dying from AIDS-related illnesses at a rate four times higher than the general population and the cause is often con-

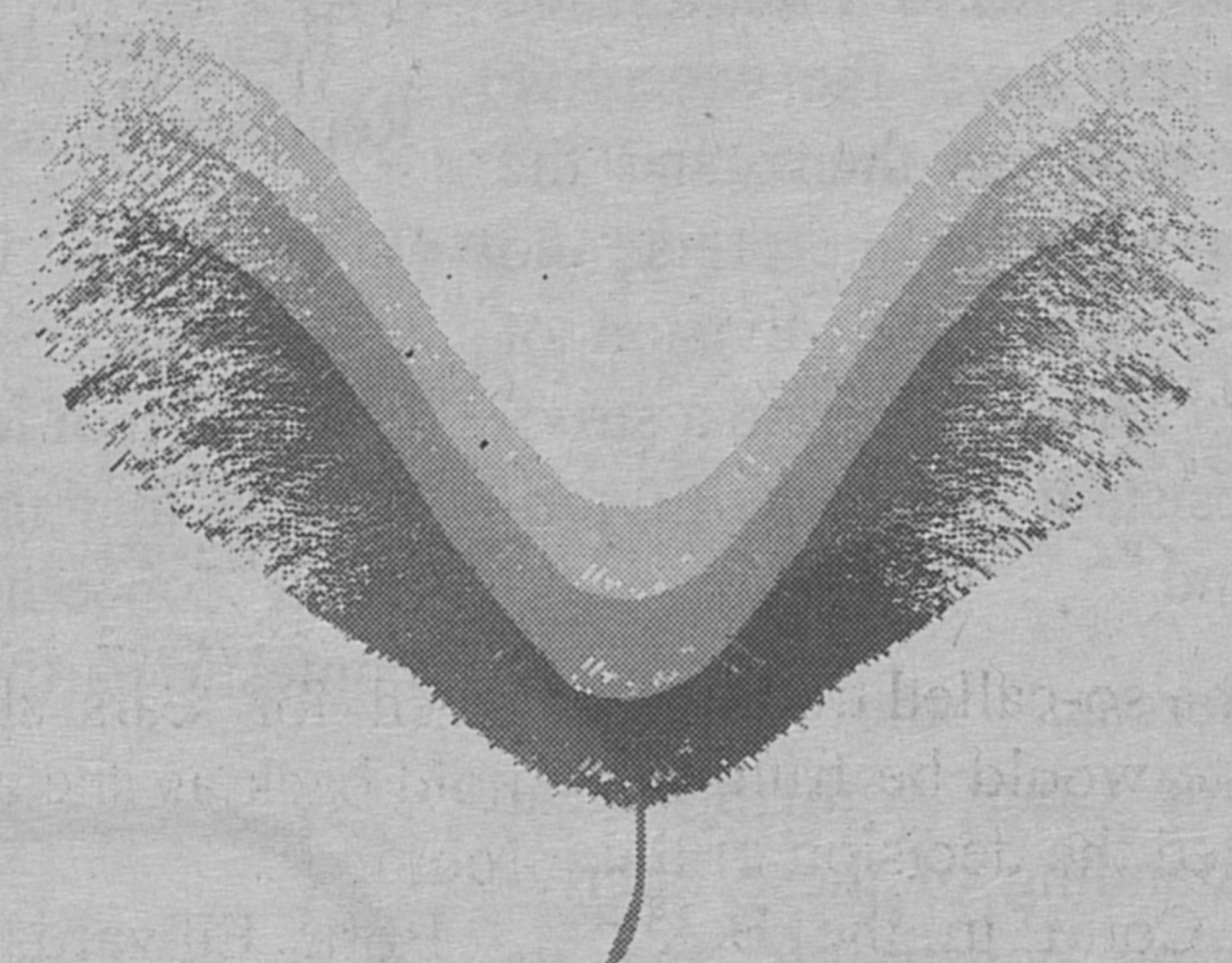
cealed on their death certificates, the Kansas City Star reported in February.

In the first of a three-part series, the newspaper said death certificates and interviews with experts indicated several hundred priests have died of AIDS-related illnesses since the mid-1980s and hundreds more are living with HIV, the virus that causes the disease.

"I think this speaks to a failure on the part of the church," said Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Gumbleton of the Archdiocese of Detroit. "Gay priests and heterosexual priests didn't know how to handle their sexuality, their sexual drive. And so they would handle it in ways that were not healthy."

The Star received 801 responses to questionnaires that were sent last fall to 3,000 of the 46,000 priests in the United States. The margin of error of the survey was 3.5 percentage points.

Six of 10 priests responding said they knew of at least one priest who had died of an AIDS-related illness, and one-third knew a priest living with AIDS. Three-fourths said the church needed to provide more education to seminarians on sexual issues. ▼



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Our Mission

The Samara Foundation of Vermont is a charitable foundation whose mission is to support and strengthen Vermont's gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered communities today and build an endowment for tomorrow.

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