

Need Help ?

Call Robert Williams

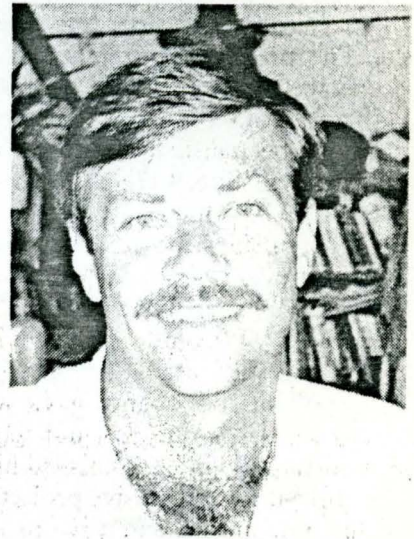
by Jan Kelly

Robert Williams has come to Provincetown to offer his services for the summer. Read this: you or someone you may know or may be acquainted with may need the telephone number 487-0496 and the help offered through this number.

Robert Williams came to preach at St. Mary of the Harbor Episcopal Church in January. Williams is a divinity student and came to St. Mary's as a guest speaker. That he was assigned to Provincetown was not an accident, but the person giving assignments told Williams he would have a particular interest in this small town at the tip of the Cape. Indeed, he has. Robert Williams is openly and publicly gay. When he gave his sermon in January, his lover Jim sat where the visiting Minister's wife usually sits. The more liberal members of the congregation gravitated to Williams, seeing and hearing that he realizes the needs of one sector of the populace.

Carolyn Kosewski of Eastham has been the key person in the setting up of Robert Williams' internship, and the Provincetown Steering Committee for this volunteer work. Preston Babbit of the Unitarian Universalist Meeting House, Dan DePalma of the Roman Catholic Church, Kitty Dewey of St. Mary of the Harbor Episcopal Church and President of their Women's Guild, Frank Reeves of *Early Morning Gospel* on WOMR, Diane Corbo of Snug Harbor — Roman Catholic, Carolyn Kosewski, Chairman, and Robert Williams, as staff members, have set up the Ecumenical Community Ministries—a non-judgmental pastoral presence. In addition, Carolyn Kosewski has founded a counseling service for parents of gay children on Cape Cod.

Robert Williams' program of a 3-month intensive practical assignment fit in with the needs of the community as perceived by the steering committee. The Jonathan Daniel's Fellowship is the grant which finances Williams' practical 3-month project. Jonathan Daniels was a freedom rider of the 60's who was murdered on a bus in Selma, Alabama. The committee of this Fellowship of Human Rights sees the homophobia of the 80's as having the same dynamics as the plight of the blacks in the 60's, and so granted the subsidy to Robert Williams for his "street ministry." Williams says that if this was a city it would be "street ministry" for the hungry, the homeless, and the addicted. But Provincetown has an "open door policy," has no street population, but does have severe problems requiring counseling. Originally, Williams thought he would be



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here for the tourists. But as he did his ground work, made his contacts, and got himself set up, he realized that the yearround population had needs equal to those of the summer influx. Williams has set up a network with guest house owners, bartenders, and restaurant owners to call him when anyone in their employ or who is visiting is in crisis. The houseboys, the waiters, the bartenders, and the "meet-rack" crowd are all targets in possible need. As the season progresses, the offered help is being used. 487-0496 is busy and active. The lover packing and leaving at 2 am is not uncommon. The guest house owner aware of the disturbance can call for the abandoned person in crisis and despair. Provincetown is the last resort in many ways. Couples come here "to make things work." Sometimes they don't work. Some come here to fall in love and don't. The bars attract this disturbance of relationships, and bartenders are particularly savvy to it. Suicidal tendencies become more evident under the influence of alcohol. The number can be called. The bartenders have an option now and can help. A restaurant owner called 487-0496. His young cook had traveled cross-country with a new lover to spend the summer in Provincetown, working and enjoying. He now realizes that his new lover is an alcoholic and in his confusion needs to talk and to be counselled.

AIDS issues are most important. The three weeks of ground work were necessary but frustrating to Robert Williams. He knew many needed him, and patiently and systematically he set himself within the community on the most intimate and yet most public position possible. His first encounter with the AIDS crisis was someone who had been diagnosed the day before.

Robert Williams was the first person told. It will be easier for that unfortunate young man now. AIDS has no humor, and we are all in this together. We all must help each other, and Robert Williams is a key to help in Provincetown of this world-wide killer which is spanning to all groups of human beings. The concept is to do pastoral counseling and crisis counseling for no fee, to offer help where it is needed.

The number 487-0496 can be called 24 hours. Williams has an answering service and a beeper. He goes to his person in need. The preferred system is to have a counseling space as well. The Provincetown Business Guild and the Chamber of Commerce have been supportive. Postcards have been distributed in the bars and through general mailings. "Need Help? Need to Talk to Someone? 487-0496. 24 hours."

Robert Williams, Seminary Student at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts is from Abilene, Texas, the key city of western Texas and the "Buckle of the Bible Belt." He is unwelcome in his own community, though it is the third largest gay center in the U.S.: too outspoken; too openly gay. Williams thinks of returning to Dallas one day and setting up an independent ministry. When he is finished his three-year program, his three-month intensive project in Provincetown, and his nine-month extensive project, he must "adopt" a diocese. Newark, New Jersey, is an obvious choice. Bishop Spong of Newark is a liberal calling to the Episcopal Church to recognize same-sex mar-

riages. Williams must find a diocese that will accept an openly gay minister. The Metropolitan Community Church is an internal organization of gays in California. A fundamentalist who was removed from his church started the M.C.C.. The National Task Force is planning for the 1988 Convention, and one powerful subject will be for the Episcopal Church to recognize same-sex relationships. The preparation is nation-wide. Williams held a seminar in Briarwood, Massachusetts on *Making Love Last—Same-Sex Relationships with Relationship Enhancement*. This seminar will be held again Columbus Day weekend in Wellfleet and possibly in February in Provincetown.

Besides this heavy work load and national involvement, Robert Williams is writing his thesis this summer, *Holy Sex: A Gay Male's Contribution to Theology*. Williams is enjoying his work and is eager to help. Besides the need of a counseling space, Williams says he has "two Big Problems": 1) he has to turn down direct propositions by saying, "I'm in a relationship"; and 2) some people think he's straight and don't trust him. So he wears a wedding ring, an earring, and a clerical collar to cover himself.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank and congratulate Gerry Studds for his distribution and mailing of educational AIDS information to his constituents. In Europe, this has been done generally and as a matter of course. In America, Gerry is the intelligent pioneer.