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Briston Fernandes retires from Catholic Charities

Briston J. Fernandes, executive director of Catholic Charities North Dakota, retired on Jan. 15. He had been with the agency since September 2002. Fernandes came to the agency after 25 years of service with Catholic Charities Diocese of Rockford in Illinois.

One of the first tasks he faced was to lead the agency's board and staff through a five-year strategic planning process, and developing a mission statement: In faithfulness to the Gospel and the mission of Jesus, Catholic Charities North Dakota serves people in need with compassion, dignity and respect, empowers them toward self-sufficiency, and works with others in advocating for justice.

Fernandes was instrumental in the formation of a collaborative with PATH, INC. and the Department of Human Service; that collaborative, Adults Adopting Special Kids (AASK), provides adoption services for children in foster care and the families who adopt them in North Dakota. In the most recent year, 113 children had their adoptions finalized.

With his encouragement, Catholic Charities Counseling Program was started in 2003 to provide counseling services to individuals, couples, families, children and adolescents. The program has grown and the six staff members served more than 200 clients in the last fiscal year.

Fernandes and his wife, Melanie, will remain in Fargo for a time, then return to Rockford, Ill., where their daughter, Melissa, and other family members continue to reside.

Kathy Hogan, Chairwoman of the Catholic Charities North Dakota Board of Directors, with input from staff members, put together the following tribute of Briston.

A Tribute to BRISTON FERNANDES: A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

Briston is a humble man of great courage. He stepped into a situation that was filled with conflict and brought peace and unity.

Briston is a man who empowers others and is full of care. His staff says he challenges them to continually grow, to be responsible and to take risks. He listens with his whole heart and hears and understands others.

Briston is a quiet and visionary leader. He knows the call and beauty of Catholic Social Justice teaching. He articulates that call in big and little actions throughout each day and year.

Briston is a man of artistic talent. He uses words, pictures, videos, poetry to broaden our understanding of God.

Briston is a man of deep faith. His spirituality guides his day to day relationships, his decisions and his vision. God is clearly one of Briton's closest friends.

Briston is a man that will be deeply missed. Thank you for all that you have given and for all that you are -- a true Gift from God.