

Institution of rector in Mallusk Parish



At the Service of Institution on October 2 are, from left: The Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison; the Rev Jacob Mercer, rector of St Brigid's, Mallusk; and the Rev Dr Martyn Cowan, preacher.

The Rev Jacob Mercer was instituted as rector of St Brigid's Parish Church, Mallusk, on October 2. Jacob had been priest-in-charge of the parish since May 31 2022.

The preacher at the Service of Institution was the Rev Dr Martyn Cowan, Vice Principal of Union Theological College, Belfast.

Before his introduction as priest-in-charge of St Brigid's, Jacob was curate of St James and St Anne's, Bermondsey, in the Diocese of Southwark, London. A native of Hertfordshire, he has worked in Christian Ministry for the past 13 years and was ordained in 2018. Jacob is married to Rebecca and they have three children.

Colin returns to his roots in Connor

The Rev Canon Colin Welsh (right), rector of Christ Church, Castledawson, Diocese of Derry and Raphoe, will be introduced as priest-in-charge of Rathcoole and Whitehouse on March 19.



Colin was brought up in St Comgall's Rathcoole, and he and his wife Anne married in St Patrick's, Jordanstown, where Colin spent his curacy following ordination in 2009. Prior to that, Colin worked in forecourt maintenance for 17 years.

This is a new partnership in ministry for these two parishes, which comprise St Comgalls and John's, Whitehouse.

Colin moved to Castledawson as rector 12 years ago. He is Rural Dean of Maghera and Kilrea and was appointed a Canon of St Columb's Cathedral, Londonderry, in March 2021.



Agherton Parish Pioneer Family Wellbeing Coordinator Naomi Jennings with her husband Nigel and family.

'I empathise with the pain in our lives'

The role of Pioneer Family Wellbeing Coordinator at Agherton Parish is a wonderful way to bless families not connected to the church and to share God's goodness, says Naomi Jennings who has recently taken up this new post.

Naomi is from Ballymoney, but she and her family have spent many years in India. "Family is hugely important to me, and caring for children and families has been part of my journey and calling as long as I can remember," Naomi said.

"The challenges and demands of family life are evident to us all and no one should feel alone or unsupported. There is help and encouragement available and as a Church we want parents and family to know that, to experience love and be blessed.

"This is because we know that we are part of God's family, that our identity is in being loved by him and that the Lord's desire is to see families strengthened and flourishing."

Naomi is married to Nigel and they have three children, Eva, 19, Enoch, 14, and Boaz, aged 12.

Before moving overseas, she completed a degree in Children's Nursing and worked in the Children's Hospice. "Caring for children with life-limiting and life-threatening conditions and supporting their families was challenging but an incredible honour. I witnessed so much hope, joy, courage and sacrificial love in the midst of pain, suffering and loss," she said.

The couple first visited India in 2009. "We both had a yearning to live and work with those in need," Naomi said. "Initially, we



Naomi Jennings during her time in India.

thought we would move to Delhi and work among the sick and homeless. However, that door closed, and we had the opportunity to move to Kerala with another family."

The family arrived in India to live and work full-time in January 2012, Eva was six years old, Enoch was one and Naomi was six months pregnant.

"We learned about business opportunities and sharing about Jesus in and through business. We learned about being intentional about living for God, trusting in him, while navigating a new culture,

language and way of life," she said.

"We loved India, the colour, the noise, the variety, the people. It was overpowering at times, the stifling heat, the sheer number of people, the divide between the rich and the poor, the temples, the call to prayer, the constant noise of people or fans or insects. But it was home for a time, and God cared for us, he made a way and today there is a school and an IT business with which we are still connected."

The family's time in India was unexpectedly disrupted by a cancer diagnosis. "At 35 weeks pregnant, it was confirmed that I had breast cancer, the same disease that had afflicted my nana and mum," Naomi said.

"Life quickly became consumed with medical investigations and a plan to induce labour. Boaz arrived safe and healthy a week later. A week after that I had surgery and then a confirmation that the cancer had spread to the lymph nodes. It was an incredibly challenging time for our family, but the grace of God was evident throughout and we were encouraged and helped by so many within India and at home."

Naomi had a mastectomy in India a week after Boaz was born. When he was a month old, the family returned to Northern Ireland where Naomi had six months of chemotherapy, three months of radiotherapy and a year of IV Herceptin, after which she started on a 10-year medication treatment.

"We returned to South India in 2014," said Naomi. "We were there until 2016, at that stage Eva was 11 and we returned home for good, for her to start secondary school."

"My nursing registration had lapsed, but I did return to childminding work when I was able. I had a few further scares and complications that required three further surgeries in Northern Ireland and a hospital admission for sepsis. Praise God I am finished with all cancer treatment, but I do still have some side effects that continue to cause fatigue and hormonal issues."

Naomi said the prayer cover the family received from the family of God in India and at home was 'amazing and palpable.'

"Anyone affected by cancer knows that the treatment regime is gruelling and the road to recovery is long," Naomi added. "However, I'm hugely thankful to be alive and well. We face battles in life, experience wounds and carry scars, but we can say that we did not and do not fight alone."

"So, if you know of a family in difficulty, maybe due to bereavement, financial



Naomi out and about in India, a tuk-tuk in the background.

stress, physical and or mental health difficulties, depression, loneliness, I would encourage you to pray. If you are experiencing difficulty, know that you are not alone."

She said that 23 years after losing her own mother to cancer, she continues to feel her loss and miss her joy. "Life often takes unexpected turns, and I think God wants us to cling to him and allow his love and strength to burst through, and it is through him that we can truly love one another," Naomi said.

"I share some of my personal challenges because I do empathise with the pain that can be present in our precious lives. I think that pain brings confusion, questions, doubt, even anger and I think that's okay. Because God understands, he sees us, he loves us, invites us into life with him, and that life sparks hope, healing, restoration and redemption."

Naomi's home church is Connect Fellowship Church in Ballymoney - a church that was started by a few families meeting in homes, including her parents.

Naomi has also recently worked for Barnardo's in a Family Support project. "The role of Pioneer Family Wellbeing Coordinator is another role I'm thankful for and excited for because it's a lovely way that we can bless families as a church."

Quoting Mother Teresa, she added: "Not all of us can do great things, but all of us can do small things with great love."

The role is part-time, 20 hours per week. "I definitely see the role as an innovative way of connecting the church with the local community, it is a wonderful way to bless families not connected to the church and to share God's goodness. I'm excited about growing a culture of support and encouraging families to thrive and grow holistically," she said.

Canons appointed



The Rev David Ferguson, rector of Ramoan and Culfeightrin, above left, and the Rev Andrew Sweeney, rector of the United Parish of Ballymoney, Finvoy and Rasharkin, right, have been appointed Canons of Lisburn Cathedral.

Announcing the appointments, Bishop George Davison said: "In addition to running busy, growing parishes in Ballycastle and Ballymoney, both have given additional service to the diocese. David has been a diligent rural dean for the Ballymena deanery for a number of years and Andrew serves as Chaplain to the Causeway Hospital."

David has been in Ballycastle since May 2011. Prior to this he was curate in Antrim from 2004. He has been Ballymena Rural Dean since 2013 and is chaplain to the Ballycastle branch of the Royal British Legion. Before his ordination in 2004, David was in public service for 29 years.

"I am overwhelmed to have been asked by the Bishop to take on this role," he said.

The Rev Andrew Sweeney has been rector of Ballymoney since 2012. Prior to this, he was Vicar of Cogges, South Leigh and North Leigh in the Diocese of Oxford. He was ordained in 1996 and served his first curacy in Bladon cum Woodstock. He moved to St Patrick's, Coleraine, as curate in 1999 and to Oxford in 2002.

Andrew is chaplain at the Causeway Hospital and Ballymoney Rugby Club.

He said he was 'surprised and delighted' when the Bishop asked him to be a Canon of Lisburn Cathedral. "I want to do what I can to support the Diocese of Connor in its outreach and mission," he said.

No date has yet been set for the Service of Installation in Lisburn Cathedral.

- The Rev Dr Colin McClure, Minister of First Larne Presbyterian Church, has been appointed Presbyterian Ecumenical Canon in the Cathedral Chapter of St Anne, Belfast, following the retirement of Dr Ruth Patterson from the Chapter.