



Fiona and Joel Kelling

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Location: Jordan



What we do: Working alongside local churches to care for vulnerable groups to strengthen the mission of the Church in the Middle East.

Happy New Year, friends!

We hope you have had joyful and restful Christmases and a good start to 2023. Here in Amman we are very grateful for the central heating we have in our new home, expensive as fuel is!

During a very busy year, we often found ourselves sharing a lot of details about activities and events, and less on how we actually are. A review of Joel's time at COP27 can be found here: <https://churchmissionsociety.org/blog/experience/good-cop-bad-cop/>, while we reflect on some of the implications of all the "doing" on our "being" during 2022.

Looking back on the past year, the words that come to mind are "hectic" and "tiring", especially the second half of the year. This has been felt physically, emotionally and mentally, and some down time at the end of the year really was required. Unfortunately, this was somewhat enforced upon us, as December heralded a month of various sicknesses and ailments. Christmas itself was a rather subdued affair, as Nora came down with tonsillitis on Christmas Eve, and we were disappointed to not even make it to church on Christmas Day. Unlike in previous years where we have joined with another family to celebrate, this year it was just us, and as a result we felt rather far from our friends and families.

However, it did help us feel vindicated in our decision not to return to the UK for the holidays. While there was an understandable desire to spend time with Joel's family, had we gone back we might have spread illness and not actually been able to enjoy time together. Joel's dad has now undergone his first round of chemotherapy and will continue with another three months' worth. While it has been a tough time, there have been some unexpected benefits: Joel and his dad now speak every fortnight on a range of topics from football and films to faith and human finitude. Please do keep them, amid the uncertainty of the future ahead, in your prayers, and Joel's mum and brothers too.

Other circumstances during the year have also created extra strain or pressure, but have simultaneously had positive effects. Moving house is never a painless process, but the additional stress it caused for a short period of time is now paying dividends. In addition to the central heating, ability to host and other benefits in space and location, one of the major changes it brought about was a shift in mode of work. Joel now commutes to the diocesan offices once a week instead of being there every day, and otherwise works from home (as Fiona always has). It has been really enjoyable and valuable for us as a couple to be able to spend



Aidan as a Roman soldier in the church Nativity play

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With each other
To the edges**



more time together – when Joel isn't travelling! – and offer advice on work matters when they arise, particularly as our spheres overlap.

What is more, our return to formal Arabic tuition means our six hours of class each week feels a bit like we get three daytime dates per week, as implausible as that may sound! Restarting lessons together has been very beneficial though.

We have different strengths when it comes to learning the language, which seems to help us both develop, both in capacity and confidence. Additionally, the shift to a Sunday–Thursday week for the children

at kindergarten has meant we are both more able to participate more in Arabic language church, which has deepened our engagement with both the content and congregation.

Aidan and Nora are also slowly making progress in Arabic, as well picking up some German songs from kindergarten. Their energy and inquisitiveness have been the source of much of our joy, as well as tiredness!

On Joel's side, in addition to a full work schedule, his journey of formation continues. The Exploring Faith course is often the highlight of his week. The diversity of the class – consisting of candidates based in Cyprus, Qatar and the UAE, and nationalities including Indian and South African – has prompted great discussion and debate and brought new perspectives and understanding of our shared faith. Joel will also preach twice more at the international congregation in Amman before the summer, which provides a good opportunity to keep learning and growing. Please pray for Joel's spiritual development as he engages more in theology and practice with the church.

Fiona (who has a tendency to be content with very little being said about herself!) has also been feeling the juggle between different work and family responsibilities. However, she finds her consultancy and voluntary work very stimulating and also really appreciates the balance that this helps create in parental roles and input.

As we look forward into 2023, in some ways the outlook is no less hectic than last year. Joel's travel begins shortly, which you'll hopefully hear about in the next letter, but we are increasingly aware of the toll that this can take on family life. Please pray for wisdom about how we spend our time in the coming year and how to build in sustainable ways of resting, while making the most of time together as a whole family when we can.

We are currently planning to make a short trip back to the UK in the summer, but with a focus on spending time with direct family. We pray it can be a really blessed time together, while we remain uncertain about the expected short- and longer-term outcomes of Joel's dad's cancer. We therefore hope and look forward to being able to spend time with you all in 2024.

Lots of love,
The Kellings



Photos from top to bottom: With Archbishop Hosam and Rafa at the Diocese of Jerusalem Christmas party in Amman; the Kellings on Christmas Day; Nora (post-Christmas Day photo!); escaping for a night to hot springs in the north of Jordan



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