



# 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.

Dear friends,

It has been a long time since we last wrote to you, and we hope you will understand the delay.

As we mentioned in previous link letters, Joel's dad, Martin, was diagnosed with bowel cancer last summer and was receiving treatment into this spring. We are sad to share that he died on 17 August, a year and a day after his initial diagnosis.

Given these events, our previous intentions to write about our experiences in the late spring – the Diocesan and Provincial Synods in April and May, and the CMS people in mission conference in Turkey at the start of June – feel both long ago and far removed from our current situation. Having run out of time to write a link letter before we all headed to Europe for the summer, we will instead pick up our story from there...

In July, the four of us travelled to France for the first leg of our primarily family-focused trip. We joined Fiona's family in Nantes to celebrate her eldest sister's 10th wedding anniversary, followed by a week together in celebration of her mum's 70th birthday at a campsite run by Spring Harvest in the Vendée. It felt like the first time we really enjoyed a proper holiday with the kids, and it was great to be together with all of the "Kelling Clan".

We arrived in England in the second half of the month and enjoyed a holiday in Somerset with Joel's parents, brothers and their wives, and Nora and Aidan's cousin Hetty. Joel's dad was increasingly immobile, but in good spirits. Many evenings were spent together sat around his bed, reminiscing about family holidays and good times spent together. We also attended Joel's grandmother's 90th birthday party, a short drive from where we were staying. It was wonderful to capture a family photograph with all the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, before Joel's dad returned to the house to rest.

The day after this family holiday ended, the funeral for Joel's aunt (his dad's sister) was held – she had died earlier in the summer from Parkinson's and dementia. She was a remarkable woman, and loving aunt, and Joel gave the eulogy on behalf of the family, incorporating words and memories from his dad. He also had the challenging privilege of leading the committal at the woodland burial site.

Having experienced this tiring and emotional day, in great awareness of its significance as a premonition of things to come, our goodbyes were particularly heavy as we left to return to Jordan. We had not anticipated at that time just how soon it would come to pass. As it stood, we were keen to apply learning from our extended travels last summer and get the kids back into kindergarten and a sense of routine after four weeks away.



*Celebrating Nora's 3rd birthday in June.*

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**Support Fiona and Joel Kelling:**  
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**With Jesus  
With each other  
To the edges**



Joel returned to finalise and facilitate a Provincial Youth Leadership Conference, bringing together young people from across the Diocese of Jerusalem and Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf from diverse national, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Archbishop Hosam came and addressed the group, and sessions were held on discernment and calling. The programme included a day trip to the Baptism Site, Mt Nebo and Madaba, and a renewing of baptismal vows and reflection on the examples of Moses and Ruth. However, Joel ended up leaving the conference early, as his dad was admitted to hospital. Joel writes:

“After waking to a flurry of messages on our family WhatsApp group, Fiona came to pick me up and I booked a seat on the first flight back the following day. That night we joined a video call with the rest of my family in Dad’s hospital room to say the prayers for the dying. When I woke up the following morning, I called back again just before Dad breathed his last. Although my flight was not until later that morning, my feeling was that I had been very much present with Dad in his final hours, and with my family too. My overwhelming sense was of profound sadness, but also of profound peace.”

Joel then flew to the UK to be with his family and help with arrangements, briefly returning to Jordan before travelling back with all of us for the funeral itself. Fiona’s mum kindly travelled down from Scotland to lend a helping hand with the kids, which allowed us both to be fully present at the services. The events were beautiful and sad, and it was a strange joy to share time with family, long-standing church and school friends, and even a few colleagues from CMS and the Anglican Alliance. Joel delivered a tribute alongside his brothers and mum and shared the pallbearing responsibility with his two brothers and dad’s best man.

Fiona and the children returned to Amman a week later, while Joel stayed on in the UK to participate in the annual retreat of the Anglican Alliance. This granted a gentle return to work, sharing in the life of what feels like a second family from around the world and being together in prayer, worship and fellowship.

Now back in Jordan, we are deeply aware of the distance between us and the rest of Joel’s family, and of the quiet home his mum will be coming home to in the evenings as they draw in earlier as the seasons change. Please keep her in your prayers as her life goes forward, and pray for us and the wider family as we wrestle and learn to live with grief. Please pray for Joel’s work, that he is able to focus the attention needed, and that the work on Church and Community Transformation would build momentum. Please pray also for the ongoing presence and flourishing of the Christian community in the Middle East, particularly as CMS meets with Anglican leaders to explore the development of work together supporting indigenous churches in the region in the coming months.

With much appreciation for your prayers, love and support,  
The Kellings

**PS** This was written before recent horrific events in Israel, Gaza and beyond. Having deep ties in these places, our hearts are broken by the suffering, and worry for friends. Pray for an end to violence, that love may triumph over hate.



**Photos from top to bottom:**  
Taking the ferry from France to England; Joel’s whole family gathering; Aidan and Nora start a new year at kindergarten.



## Going further with Church Mission Society

Could God be calling you to follow him to the edges with CMS? We’d love to connect and help you discern what God might be saying. Find out more about how we can help you to step into God’s mission at [churchmissionsociety.org/explore](https://churchmissionsociety.org/explore)

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