



# 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,

Much of our emotional, work and prayer focus these last months has faced towards the Palestinian people, our friends in Gaza, the West Bank and Israel, and the institutions that we work alongside in the Land of the Holy One.

Despite the attacks and rumours of conflagration in our neighbouring countries, rest assured we are safe here in Jordan. Nevertheless, this war feels close to us, not only in physical proximity, but as we have friends and colleagues suffering in myriad ways as a result. In some ways, it is inevitable that for us, this is not “just another war”. At the same time, it is also a challenge to think about how we often shut ourselves off from injustice and anguish across the world, be that in Ukraine, Sudan, Myanmar or the UK itself.

Our own pain at the suffering of loved ones is too great to adequately describe in this short space. One particularly black day in October, Fiona learned that her best friend in Gaza’s family home had been destroyed, resulting in the tragic death of her only son as well as many other family members. That same night, Al-Ahli Hospital – the major Anglican institution in Gaza city – was also hit by a rocket strike, which landed in the central plaza of the compound where hundreds of people were taking refuge. We were at the time hosting friends displaced from St George’s College in Jerusalem, and it was some comfort to have them with us, to rail at the situation, grapple with the disbelief and cry out for mercy.

Since then, things have only got worse. Many people have said after speaking with us, it is one thing to hear about the situation on the news – it is another to listen to the names and stories, hear the description of homes invited in to, and consider the loss and circumstances of those people now. For us, it is difficult to know where to direct the outrage, heartbreak, yearning and stubborn hope. Please cry out with us, not only for an immediate ceasefire, the return of hostages and release of political prisoners, but that somehow out of this mess a lasting and equitable peace for all Palestinians and Israelis can be possible. Please don’t let your own hearts become numb. And please, where you have any opportunity to encourage greater empathy, compassion or accountability in political leaders in the UK, do not let it pass by.

Both of us have tried to do likewise. For Fiona, this has involved picking up some of her previous role with the Shelter Cluster Palestine, to provide surge support to the team advocating for and coordinating the provision of basic shelter assistance to repeatedly displaced Gazans. On his side, Joel has been working alongside the Diocese of Jerusalem to support a joint appeal across the Anglican Communion to increase the assistance that can be provided, while reducing the load on overworked diocesan staff. There is great need for financial support not only for Al-Ahli, but the healthcare and educational facilities of the West Bank. The economy of Palestine



*The sanctuary of St Philips chapel at Al-Ahli hospital in 2017, which today has been converted into a ward.*

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has collapsed due to the disappearance of pilgrims and because of cancelled work permits for many Palestinians previously working in the Israeli economy. Although far from the transformative action required, it has felt like a fortification of our own humanity to try to do what we can, while recognising the greater renewal and reconciliation so desperately needed.

It was both strange and something of a relief for Joel to travel to Dubai for COP28 in December as part of the Anglican Communion's delegation, alongside Archbishop Hosam from Jerusalem and other colleagues from across the globe. The first ever Faith Pavilion, something Joel contributed towards the creation of, enabled side events to be held on engaging with the private sector, listening to indigenous communities and comprehending Christian resistance to engaging in climate justice.

The local Anglican church were amazing hosts, putting on a meal for the diversity of Anglicans present, hosting an ecumenical prayer service at Christ Church Jebel Ali and facilitating the interfaith Talanoa Dialogue. It was a great

opportunity to show the world the growing, diverse and vibrant presence of the Body of Christ in the Gulf. The delegation also met with representatives from various states and, where appropriate, prayed with them, showed solidarity and on occasion challenged their ambition in regard to climate action. It was exciting to share with them that the Anglican Communion has signed the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty (your church, diocese or province can too!), even while the overall outcomes of COP28 weren't as positive as we might have hoped.

In the aftermath of COP and all the work on Palestine, and while continuing to grieve of the loss of Joel's dad, it was very good to spend time in the UK with Joel and Fiona's families over Christmas and New Year and for Aidan and Nora to see all their cousins. The new year quickly got off to an intense start, with Fiona participating in humanitarian meetings in Washington DC and completing another consultancy, and Joel returning to Dubai to host a pilot project on the Church in migration. The fruition of one and a half years work, participants from North Africa, the Levant and the Gulf explored how the Body of Christ can better provide both theological resources and coordinated practical action to support migrants, refugees and asylum seekers coming into and through the region.

As Joel heads off again to the Cyprus and the Gulf Diocesan Synod, please pray a new Bishop will be elected to serve them. We are both looking forward to re-establishing a rhythm of life on his return, including resuming Arabic lessons again, the continuation of Joel's theological studies online and his training in the parish of St Paul's Ashrafiyeh. Please pray for us as we look to make decisions for the year ahead, particularly regarding Joel's training and our future role in the Middle East.

The Kellings

PS You can read more of our reflections on recent months at the links below:

**Joel's piece on the church in the Holy Land from October:**

<https://churchmissionsociety.org/blog/news/gaza-and-israel-and-the-church-on-the-frontline/>

**Fiona's initial reflections on Gaza (Words under Siege):**

<https://odihpn.org/publication/responses-to-the-humanitarian-situation-in-gaza-and-israel/#kelling>

**Joel's article with the Anglican Alliance on COP28:**

<https://anglicanalliance.org/reflecting-on-cop28-so-far-a-blog-post-by-joel-kelling/>



*Photos from top to bottom: Gaza harbour in 2016 looking towards Rimal, much of which has now been destroyed; side event in the faith pavilion at COP 28 with Archbishop Julio; winter walk along the canal with Joel's mum at Christmas; small group discussions at the Safe Migration pilot in Dubai.*



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