



# Fiona and Joel Kelling

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Contact details:  
fionakelling@gmail.com  
joelkelling@gmail.com



**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 feels like both so much and so little has changed since we last wrote to you.

The atrocities in Gaza have not abated, and we continue to “pray without ceasing” not only for a lasting ceasefire, but for courageous and sacrificial leadership that can somehow bring a just peace for Palestinians and Israelis. Please pray with us for those displaced by the ongoing violence and destruction across the Middle East, not only in Gaza and the West Bank, but in Israel and Lebanon, and for release of all hostages held in Gaza. Please also remember Layan Nasir, a member of the Anglican church in Birzeit in the West Bank, who is being held in administrative detention without charge since April. Pray for her family, and that all others held without charge may receive justice and release. Pray that Al Ahli may be able to continue to provide lifesaving healthcare to those in desperate need in Gaza City, while sheltering and feeding hundreds more.

On the one hand, we had really not anticipated that the Anglican Alliance project that Joel has been helping to support, which he is now developing the second phase of, would still be in an emergency context, rather than recovery. More positively, the appeal has raised nearly \$450,000 from Christian agencies across the world, supporting not only Al Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City – including its outpost clinic in Rafah, which has since been displaced by the ongoing offensive – but additional Anglican hospitals, rehabilitation centres and schools affected by the severely damaged economy in the West Bank.

At the same time, there have been significant advances in the past few months regarding plans for Joel's training towards ordination. While he has thoroughly enjoyed his part time study, it has become clear that a quicker process would be more beneficial to his ability to serve in the Diocese of Jerusalem. While we were originally exploring the possibility of full-time residential training at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, with the instability in Lebanon and threat of conflagration of the war with Israel it has not felt like a wise option at this time. Instead, with Archbishop Hosam's encouragement, Joel has been offered a place at Ripon College Cuddesdon, just outside of Oxford (which has several existing CMS links). It was a real joy for this news to be shared by Archbishop Hosam to the Diocesan Synod in Amman in the middle of May, and for Joel to receive the encouragement and excitement of the Anglican family across the region. We will therefore be heading back to the UK this summer for him to take up his place starting October 2024.

Joel's training at Cuddesdon and our subsequent temporary relocation to the UK also comes with a number of other timely benefits. Following the death of Joel's dad last summer, it will be good to be closer to Joel's



*Dawn rising over Palestine at the Easter sunrise service at Mount Nebo.*

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**With Jesus  
With each other  
To the edges**



mum, who is still in Kidlington, as well as his brother's newly expanded family, who are also returning to Oxfordshire. Cuddesdon is also where his dad studied theology, which holds additional meaning and connection. And (particularly from Fiona's perspective), the last months have taken a heavy emotional and mental toll, and we hope that some time in the UK as part of a college community can serve as a time of replenishment for us as a family, before returning to the inevitable level of uncertainty and complexity of life in the Middle East again as we continue our mission partner journey.

In that respect, as Joel has been studying part time through the Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf, he is able to transfer existing credits towards his upcoming studies, which means he could obtain the requisite number of credits in a reduced timeframe of four terms. This would enable us to return to the Diocese of Jerusalem in the early months of 2026, ready for Joel to serve in ordained ministry. In the meantime, Joel will continue on a more

limited basis with the Anglican Alliance, particularly outside of term time. He will also remain the lead for the Indigenous Churches Hub that CMS is in the process of establishing, which met in person in Cairo in February and will meet again with a larger group later this year. We are also both keen to keep our Arabic up, and will continue conversational classes online, while also hoping that there are voluntary opportunities or some of the training ministry Joel is offered might be amongst Arabic speaking refugees or asylum seekers.

Although it will certainly come with its own busyness and challenges, Joel is very excited about the transition to full-time study and invigorated by the prospect. We also look forward to being able to visit many of you in the coming months to thank you in person for your ongoing support and share more about our engagement in the Middle East so far as well as our future commitment to the life and work of the church in the region. Please also feel free to be in touch to ask any questions about this upcoming period.

Before then, there is the small issue of leaving life as we have known it for the past six years! Please pray for us as we try to get organised, especially deciding what needs to be brought back, what can be stored here, and the process of selling what we can; for Joel developing the Provincial Youth Leadership workshop which will take place in Cyprus at the end of August, as well as his ongoing Anglican Alliance workstreams; for Fiona as she wraps up her current work and figures out what comes next, as well as for her continued engagement and opportunities to contribute to Mosaic Middle East; for Aidan and Nora as they handle the transition and gear themselves up to start in a local primary school (and that they would get places in our first choice as we applied late!); and for our "landing" in Oxford, time with family over the summer and the settling in to our new accommodation and community in Cuddesdon.

Grace and Peace,

Fiona and Joel



**Photos from top to bottom:** Joel serving at the Palm Sunday service in St Paul's Asrafiyeh; exploring the desert castles on a visit from Joel's mum in April; Joel and Rev George on the rooftop of St Paul's Asrafiyeh with Bishop Sean Semple; Joel attending the consecration of Bishop Sean Semple at St Christopher's in Bahrain.



## Going further with Church Mission Society

**Jesus never gives up. Neither should we.** We live in a fractured, hurting world. It can be tempting to give up: on hope, on people, on the idea that things can ever change. Yet, Jesus invites us to follow him on a journey to the edges. Find out more at [churchmissionsociety.org/nevergiveup](https://churchmissionsociety.org/nevergiveup)

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