

Fiona and Joel Kelling

Link Letter no. 15 | November 2021

churchmissionsociety.org/kelling

CHURCH
MISSION
SOCIETY



The call in action

Dear friends,

“*Alhamdulillah 3al salameh!*” – the familiar cry rings out as we step back inside the bakery a few doors down from the entrance to our house. It literally means “Praise God you have arrived with peace” and is what people say to those who have returned from a trip – regardless of how long they have been away. While I select from the array of delicious *manaqeesh* pastries, the story of return and re-entry begins – “...yes, we came back!... we were stuck in the UK – *lianu corona* [because of COVID-19] *zay kulshi* [like everything else]... yes, Nora is much bigger now, and Aidan – he’s upstairs with his mum. We just got back last night”. As we walk around our neighbourhood later in the day more familiar faces greet us on our way to get groceries. “*Marhaba Aidan!*” is the greeting from one of the shelf stackers – and while Aidan makes it clear he has forgotten him by hiding behind my legs, it is clear that we have made an impression on those around us, and the welcome on return is a warm one.

Over the course of our first week back we encounter other well-known faces on the streets around us and muddle through with our rusty Arabic; as we stop by the phone shop to top up our phones, take the children to nursery past the friendly clothes shop owners on the corner, greet the lottery ticket seller delighted by the sight of Nora who continues to offer us a ticket every time we pass despite us never showing any inclination to buy one, and at the barber’s, where Joel is shorn of his longer lockdown hair to something more appropriate for the temperatures here.

For Aidan, who has become accustomed to the much more socially distanced and personal space-respecting nature of interactions in the UK, many of these exchanges have been a challenge, as he flinches away from children or adults pinching his cheeks as is the custom here. His shyness has receded over the weeks since we returned though and he is back at nursery, happy and comfortable with friends he has remembered and exciting new craft activities. Nora, entering nursery for the first time, seems to have none of the separation anxiety that Aidan dealt with when he first started, disappearing off into her room before we get much of a chance to say goodbye!

However, despite the warm greetings on return, which were mirrored at work and in church, it has been a challenging and exhausting time. There has been an abrupt reintroduction to how things work (or don’t) in Jordan, or at least, work differently to in the UK. Administrative issues have taken up much of our time, between reapplying for residency and a work permit, sorting out our car tax and MOT equivalent, and struggling to resolve the problems of a non-functioning oven and dilapidated bathroom in our apartment. On top of this, our



Name: Fiona and Joel Kelling

Location: Amman, Jordan

Our call: To support and strengthen Christian communities in the Middle East, reaching out to poor and marginalised groups (especially refugees) and encouraging reconciliation through interfaith exchange.

Our role: Working alongside local churches and institutions to provide practical and spiritual care to vulnerable groups to strengthen the mission of the Church within the Middle East.



Continued over the page

Watching shrak being made at the bakery

car windscreen was smashed overnight, along with that of three of our neighbours. While the glass was replaced within the day, the process of getting justice or restitution was a revealing insight into how conflicts are resolved at a community, rather than official level. Meanwhile, Aidan's sleep disruption has continued and now that Nora is sharing a room with him she is also having interrupted nights and there is a bit of undoing of bad sleep habits to be done! We are all pretty drained at the moment as a result, so please do pray for this to improve.

Joel's work has also been fairly full-on since returning. The ability to meet in person has had a positive impact on what can be achieved in meetings, and it was great to host a planning meeting for next year's provincial clergy and spouses conference with participants from Cyprus, Israel and Palestine in attendance, with the hope of a regional gathering next year. Similarly the Climate Justice group he leads as part of the ACT Alliance gathered participants from Lebanon and Iraq to plan activities for the coming year. The lead-up to COP27, which will be held in Egypt, is a great chance for the church in the region to advocate for more ambitious responses to climate change, and show that Christians are engaged in creation care.

He had hoped to take a group of clergy and lay people to Northern Ireland to see the work of Church and Community Transformation (CCT) up close, but due to the UK's (lack of) recognition of certain vaccines and vaccine regimes it has had to be postponed until the New Year. While we advocate and pray for changes to these policies, Diane Holt from Thrive Ireland and Tearfund was able to come to Jordan, allowing those working together over the past year on contextualising the process to finally meet in person – and bring more churches and people into the conversation. We hope to begin training facilitators for the pilot parishes in spring next year. Pray with us that the result of this work is a church better equipped to participate in God's mission, deepening faith and transforming communities.

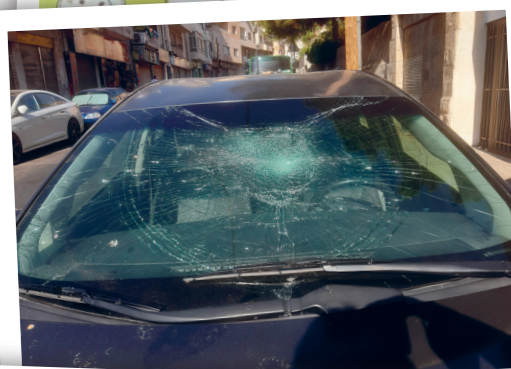
With both children in nursery in the morning, Fiona has also been able to begin working again, with a new consultancy which started in October. We were also very fortunate to take some time out over half term to visit the breathtaking Dana biosphere reserve for our first camping experience as a family, and enjoyed a visit from Fiona's mum and aunt.

We hope to be able to travel to the land of Jesus' birth and celebrate Christmas in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and pray the knowledge of Emmanuel brings hope and joy to you all this Christmas.

Grace and peace,

The Kellings

Photos from top to bottom: A studious Aidan at nursery; a very smashed car windscreen; the CCT team visit the Schneller school; hiking while at Dana nature reserve



GOING FURTHER WITH CHURCH MISSION SOCIETY

We live in a violent world but CMS partners in Africa and across the globe are bringing change, hope and freedom to lives wrecked by war. You can help bring the peace of Christ to lives torn apart by conflict too. Find out more at churchmissionsociety.org/christmas2021

If you would like to discuss your mailings with us or to receive this link letter on a regular basis, please email supporter.care@churchmissionsociety.org or call 01865 787400

You can give to Fiona and Joel at:
churchmissionsociety.org/kelling

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

Church Mission Society is a mission community acknowledged by the Church of England. Registered Company No. 6985330 and Registered Charity No. 1131655 (England and Wales) and SC047163 (Scotland).