

## YCCN COP26 Relay through London.

Climate change and the state of the Environment are huge topics of conversation for young people today because the damage that has been done to our world is already having an effect and if something isn't done soon it will severely impact our futures. It isn't enough to just talk about the problem, so I was excited to be able to "Rise to the Moment" and join the COP26 Relay as it passed through London.



With Rev'd James and my mum, who also happens to be Youth Worker at St Mary's, we met the walkers early on Wednesday, 4<sup>th</sup> August, at the Petersham Gate in Richmond Park. We had brought refreshments of cereal bars and satsumas for everyone so as we handed them out we had an opportunity to meet our fellow walkers. I was instantly struck by the fact that people of all ages had joined the cause, not just the young, but that no matter their age, everyone was very passionate about our cause. We were a small group of about 16 people but we enjoyed chatting and walking across Richmond Park and then on to Wimbledon Common where we stopped for lunch at the Windmill Café. Well rested, we continued on in high spirits and made good time to our next rest point at St Barnabas Church where we picked up some more enthusiastic walkers and the leaders on our section recorded some radio publicity. Bethany of YCCN did a fantastic job arranging everything and our lead walker, Ian, ensured that we all kept on track. He had previously walked all the way to the COP21 meeting in Paris so we were pretty confident he would find Clapham! As it happened, the day's 14 miles of relay was completed ahead of schedule giving us plenty of time to admire the amazing banner the congregation of St Paul's Clapham had made to celebrate our arrival and rest



our weary feet before a service of prayer and encouragement and some music from a local community choir.



The following day the plan was to walk to St Paul's Cathedral which was a much shorter distance, but we were a much larger group to keep together and we were meeting lots more walkers along the way, including a group who had walked all the way from Canterbury. Our pace was slower but this was a good thing as we could talk to more people and I had persuaded my brother to join us too so I could introduce him to the walkers from the previous day. We were particularly inspired by Oliver who had produced the most amazing banner and had been on lots of similar demonstrations before so was full of stories of his previous adventures. We also got to find out more about YCCN and the connection with Christian Aid. One of the Christian Aid reps seemed familiar and we realised that she had spoken at St Mary's earlier in the year.





On our route to St Paul's Cathedral our highlight was a visit to Lambeth Palace where we were



able to share our concerns with the Archbishop's team. We were also able to eat lunch in the beautiful gardens before a tour by the head gardener. It was a real oasis of peace in the busy city. We couldn't stop for long as we were due outside Parliament to protest briefly in this famous spot before reaching St Paul's Cathedral. As we surged over the Millennium Bridge it felt very special to be with so many likeminded people all trying to make a difference. We were greeted at St Paul's by a huge crowd of supporters and the YCCN boat. Chine Macdonald spoke on behalf of Christian Aid and a huge banner was unveiled before we all prayed. I was proud to be part of the relay and look forward to watching its progress onwards to Scotland but the hard work is really just starting. We can all make a difference and I look forward to continuing to help with the environmental initiatives that we are introducing at St Mary's Barnes.



Imogen Smith

