

It's a privilege to be the Mayor's chaplain this year, and his theme 'The Environment' makes it even better. I have long been interested in climate change, but in the last couple of years that has turned into a passion.

A couple of weeks ago I facilitated the Mayor's Multi-Faith event. It was wonderful to hear eight faith traditions tell that our earth is a gift to be thankful for, and our gratitude inspires our stewardship of it. But also how worried they are that things are spiraling downwards. I think I speak for all of them today. I am also a governor of St Stephen's Church School, in which there is a group, FACE - Families Against Climate Emergency. I add my voice to theirs, and many other children of Bath and NE Somerset.

BaNES and particularly Bath, is known for its unique heritage. Councils through the centuries have taken responsibility for that heritage seriously. But even the best Roman remains, and the most evocative Jane Austen interior is nothing compared to the heritage that is our living planet.

In the multi-faith day I loved the Jewish presentation, the story of an old man who daily walked a road which had no shade. He decided to plant an avenue of carob trees to provide shelter for travellers. A stranger asked what he was doing, and being told scoffed, 'Carob trees take years to grow, do you think you'll still be around to see them?' To which the old man replied, 'No, but my children and grandchildren will'.

We hear that our care of the earth is for our children's sake. Sadly, this is no longer sufficient. Reports about the destruction of habitats and climate are worsening, a recent one tells how climate change means insects are being made extinct eight-times faster than other animals - and could be wiped out in 100 years - another warns that coral reefs are being destroyed. Losing these ecosystems will have catastrophic effects. The smallest and most vulnerable animals suffer first, and it's the same with humanity.

I read recently that we are the first generation affected by climate change, and we are the last who can do something about it.

And yet there can be hope. Many people seek to decrease their carbon footprint in the choices they make about transport, diet, and plastic use. In churches, schools and many other institutions there is also growing concern. But the common belief is that this is not going to be enough. The future health of our earth needs brave and visionary nations, governments, industry, business corporations ... and councils.

My friends - I urge you to make BaNES known for a big and brave decision: to make us Carbon Neutral by 2030. In all the votes of all the councils in all the years in this chamber, it would be just one. Yet its impact would be huge - an inspiring example to our children, communities and beyond. I know it will be the harder road, but it would show that you recognize the vital importance of reversing climate change, and are prepared to do something about it. Imagine the BaNES logo on website, letter heads, publications, recycling lorries, vans proudly stating, 'Carbon Neutral by 2030'. It shows our commitment to the most important heritage of all – the life of our Earth.

Philip Hawthorn