

National Association of Civic Officers - ideas for Remembrance Day 2020

Doing nothing on Remembrance Sunday is surely not an option - public opinion would be inflamed with the danger of parallels being drawn between the hardships of war and a pandemic - 'there was no option for those fighting to stop because things got difficult!'

Here are some ideas for a ceremony during the pandemic:-

Perhaps we should start with the minimum public expectation of Remembrance Sunday - that at 11.00am a two-minute silence is observed, ideally started and ended with Last Post and Reveille, played live or recorded.

Thereafter a wreath will be laid at a Memorial. The more senior the person laying any wreath the greater their claim that they do it on behalf of those who cannot be there. A Lord Lieutenant, High Sheriff, Mayor or Chair could therefore lay a wreath on behalf of many thousands of people. If you can, perhaps invite a uniformed representative from one of the armed services to join the dignitary - you may have a military base, TA Centre, or Freedom regiment that would be pleased to be represented and take part in this way.

A further expectation though is that representatives of ex- service, youth and civilian groups would also lay wreaths. These groups may be reluctant to accept that the one wreath from a dignitary also represents them. As a side issue - have you considered a response to any request from Black Lives Matter to lay a wreath? If you do have a ceremony, on what basis would you exclude them if they have purchased a RBL wreath? Why not say yes and use it to highlight the contribution of the BAME community, as their stories may be interwoven with local regimental history?

Dependent on the geography of the memorial and the space around it, it may be possible to organise a socially distanced wreath laying ceremony. The challenge for organisers though, is to manage the public, potentially thousands, who traditionally and understandably want to watch the ceremony.

Experience from VE75 and VJ75 events has shown that the use of technology and social media can help, if live images can be streamed to devices of those who would normally attend, to enable any ceremony to be watched at home. 'Remember from Home' is an expression, which can be used to market this idea. The whole ceremony could of course be pre-recorded and broadcast at 11.00am - a virtual Remembrance Sunday. Whatever you choose to do, advance promotion of it will be important, to let the public know how they can become involved.

In those areas with dozens of ceremonies at local RBL branches and/or parish churches we cannot expect sufficient Police resources to prevent gatherings taking place, so we must consider discouraging any event that would encourage potentially harmful gatherings.

The poppy is a powerful symbol and can still be used effectively. There are giant building poppies available, which show council support when installed on their premises. Another council is investigating lighting its building in red for the remembrance period.

Elsewhere there are plans to have the ceremony on military premises, where public attendance is easily restricted, but to broadcast it live for maximum virtual attendance.

You may have an inventory of every war memorial in your local authority area - could this be a year to have dispersed ceremonies, with elected members, council officials and others ensuring that a tribute is laid at every one of them simultaneously - dozens of tiny ceremonies making a significant whole, with a photo montage on your website?

Whatever you do, promote it in advance with recorded messages from your civic head on websites, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc. Tell your NACO colleagues (in advance) by using the Message Board, so the best of them may be taken up widely.