

ENQUIRE WITHIN

Question: *Whilst I enjoyed the Remembrance Sunday Service at Greenford's War Memorial, this year, would I be right in saying that the leadership of the Service and those attending it, were hardly reflective of the multi-cultural society in which we now live, Neil? Isn't it time to stop the whole thing and think again about a different approach?*

Answer: Well, you are right in that there isn't an ethnic mix at the Service which reflects the ethnicity of Greenford today, but that doesn't necessarily mean that we should end the present way of doing things.

The Order of Service is set by the authorities, with the local Legion Committee having a choice about some aspects of variety.



As the Chaplain to the Greenford Branch of the Royal British Legion, I am responsible for working with the Committee to produce a result which serves several purposes. The chief of these is to offer fitting Remembrance for the fallen and to do so with the people of the town gathered together with the political leaders of the Borough united on this day of all days in our common respect for those who paid the ultimate price for duty. On this day, political differences are put aside as we stand together.

To reflect the diversity of the Christian church in England, I invite the local clergy and Ministers to attend or appoint a deputy to attend and share in the leadership of the Act of Worship. This is not a token, but a serious act of Christian Unity which matches the unity of everyone else gathered at the War Memorial. Representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Methodist Church and the Baptist Church each take a substantial part of the worship and the Salvation Army Band accompanies the hymns.

As the Hon. Branch Chaplain, I lead the worship and preach a short sermon which I always try to make a key-note address, bringing the principal points out of the many important issues and relating them to the

happenings of today, the young people of today and the ever declining numbers of combatants of the two world wars. It is also a vital part of my role to bring out any current conflicts and to address the issues of war and peace in these too.

As for the multi-cultural aspects, there may be a case for introducing representatives from other world faiths, but this case has to be put into the perspective of the history of Remembrance Sunday. There would be little integrity in including people from other faiths just because they happen to be there now. There would be

integrity in including those who fought alongside or within the British and Commonwealth and Allied forces.

When I first came to Greenford, a section of the parade included AJEX, the Association of Jewish Ex Servicemen, and they were very welcome. One of the number spoke to me, very early on in my time, and told me how they joined in the parts which they could, but

were not in any way offended by the Christian content because they understood that Britain was a Christian country, and some AJEX members were very grateful for what Britain had offered them during their flight from Hitlerism in the 1930's and 1940's.

Responsibility for change belongs to those who lead at a higher level than the branch. I know that every year, the leadership of the British Legion and the leaders of the Churches discuss improvements and modernisation for this service, and changes there have been over the past 25 years.

I can imagine representatives of men of other faiths who fought under the Union flag in conflicts and made their own contribution and indeed, sacrifices, being made welcome eventually. Ghurkhas, for example. But it would be hard to imagine Muslim leaders wanting to attend a War Memorial service whilst our troops are serving in Afghanistan, wouldn't it?

That perhaps is the measure of how far we have to go to bring a lasting peace to the world in which we live.

Neil Richardson