40th Anniversary of the Ecumenical Agreement/Covenant in Toorak

A Melbourne Catholic parish is celebrating 40 years of ecumenical prayer and friendship with neighbouring Christian churches.

Yesterday, Pentecost Sunday, marked the 40th anniversary of the Toorak Ecumenical Agreement/Covenant which was signed on Pentecost Sunday May 25 1980 by the three main Christian churches of Toorak – the Catholic parish of St Peter’s, the Anglican parish of St John’s and the Uniting Church in Australia parish. The Swedish Church has since joined the Toorak Ecumenical Movement.

St Peter’s parish priest Fr Brendan Hayes said official celebrations for the anniversary were on hold due to the coronavirus but special prayers for the anniversary were said at each church’s Sunday service yesterday.

He cited the Catholic Church’s International Eucharistic Congress held in Melbourne in February 1973 as influential in the growth of ecumenism in the city.

“Ecumenical services were held in many areas of the Archdiocese and parishioners from the three churches in Toorak gathered at St Peter’s in a crowded church,” Fr Hayes recalled.

“In March (1973) Catholic women participated for the first time in the Women’s World Day of Prayer, the clergy of Toorak began to meet regularly and by 1976 the first Palm Sunday combined service was held at St Peter’s. The Toorak Ecumenical Movement members have monthly prayer meetings, an ecumenical Way of the Cross on Good Friday and combined services at Pentecost and Advent. The churches also run a charitable opportunity shop and hold an annual food drive for the needy at Christmas.

“Over the years the face of ecumenism has changed considerably because the former religious/societal divisions are no longer so powerful. But in the Toorak area we have continued and developed the primary enthusiasm of 40 years ago,” Fr Hayes said.

“Despite the coronavirus restrictions this Pentecost we look forward to a later celebration and pray for God’s continued blessings on the next 40 and more years.”