

Eastwood Baptist (29/4/'18) **ROME, EASTWOOD & BEYOND** (Roms 15:14-33)

**Introduction** What are your favourite childhood memories? Mine are memories of times of family “togetherness”. There is, I believe, a deep-seated human need for community, for the experience of being together with others, particularly with others with whom we feel strongly connected.

**Sharing, Being Together** The New Testament confirms that this is also important in Christian experience. Among Paul’s favourite words are *allēlōn* (one another), words beginning with *sun-* (co-, together) and words of the *koinos* word group (words concerning what is in common, or shared). Words of all three kinds occur in this morning’s Bible reading. **Look at Romans 15:14** (able to instruct one another), **26** (*koinonia*, sharing of resources), **30** (*sunagōnisasthai*, to struggle, or strive, together with), **32** (*sunanapausōmai*, to find rest together with). And have you noticed something else? This being-together of the Christians in Rome is not limited to Rome. It begins there (v.14), but it does not end there – it extends to poor Christians in Jerusalem (v.26), to Paul himself (vv.30,32) and through Paul to the people of Spain who are yet to hear the gospel – **read vv.23-24**. It is the same for us here at Eastwood Baptist Church today. There is much of Christian sharing, of being together through Christ, that we must experience here, through face-to-face and week-by-week contact. But if our experience of being together in Christ, and of serving Christ together, stops here, then we are missing out on something wider, and others are missing out on what we could be sharing with them. It is this wider connection which I want to emphasise this morning.

**Wider Ministries** In Romans 15 we have already seen Paul’s desire that the Christians of Rome should strive alongside him through prayer, and that they should support his intended mission to Spain. He probably was looking for several kinds of support. Certainly their prayer, almost certainly their money, but probably also assistance in making Rome a base for going further west and individuals able to speak Latin who would go with him to Spain. Elsewhere in the NT we see many other examples of Paul’s reliance on supporters, supporters scattered across the Roman Empire. He received financial support from the Christians of Philippi; he asked all the churches which he had founded to pray for him; he drew co-workers from many different churches; he relied on people in the churches which he had founded to carry on the work which he had begun. Many Christian workers and Christian organisations are in a similar position today, both within our Baptist association of churches and beyond it. I’ll take Morling College as my primary example, simply because it is the example I know the most about. Morling College relies on the prayers of people in churches like Eastwood Baptist. It relies on churches like ours to encourage people to consider studying at the College, and to support

people who respond to such encouragement. It relies on churches working together through the Baptist Association for some of its financial support. It relies on churches like ours to provide opportunities for students and graduates of the College to gain practical experience and a supportive place for ministry. But this is true of other Baptist ministries also, such as Baptist World Aid Australia, which we heard about a fortnight ago through Cameron Eccleston. Baptist World Aid is only able to help people in need across the world because people in churches like ours support the work. We can also look at this from the other side. Baptist World Aid enables us to help people whom we could not reach by ourselves. We can say the same things about ministries involving both Baptists and others, such as Global Recordings Network, which we'll be hearing about on May 20 from Graydon Colville. Graydon is also one of the cross-cultural workers supported by our church, along with Dema and Carolyn, Tobias and Heather and Mike Peereboom. Through our support for them we are connected with missionary work both near at hand and far away.

**Wider Needs** Paul also pointed the Romans to needs a long way from Rome - *read 15:25-27*. He makes no direct appeal for help here, but he does want the Christians of Rome to think about needy Christians in Jerusalem. And he does make a direct appeal in another letter - *read 2 Corinthians 8:7-8,13-14*. Paul wants the Christians of Corinth to look beyond the city of Corinth, and to see other Christians in need. And I am sure that the Holy Spirit speaks through Paul to Christians today who have comparative abundance. God calls upon Australian Christians to think of poor Christians in other countries. And God calls on Christians in churches with great resources to think of churches with fewer resources. In this second case, we at Eastwood Baptist might well both find ways of helping other churches and look for help from others ourselves. As we look to the future, we should pray not only that God will make our church fruitful right here in Eastwood but also that he will make us more able to help other churches. How are we to respond to this now? In large part, by working with others. We can give to Baptist World Aid in order to help people in need in many countries. We can cooperate with other Baptists in our area to help and be helped. We can look for opportunities to cooperate with Christians other than Baptists in our immediate neighbourhood in order to have greater impact on our community.

**Sending Out** Giving isn't only a matter of money - it's also sometimes a matter of sending people out. Antioch gave up two of its best teachers when it sent Barnabas and Paul out to preach the gospel. Lystra, although probably a small church, gave up one of its most promising young members when it sent Timothy out with Paul. We did not choose to release Pastor Enoch to go and minister at St Marys, but we can choose to send him out with our prayers and encouragement, and with the knowledge that he, along with Joanna and Zoe, will continue to be in our hearts. Each church needs to hear the challenge of Antioch and Lystra. We need to

make sure that the challenge of service beyond the doors of this church is kept before our members. We need to make sure that those who are considering this challenge know that they will not go out unsupported.

**Conclusion** All Christians are in ministry. But we are also in ministry *together*. We are in ministry together here at Eastwood Baptist Church. But we are also in ministry together with Christians in many other churches. We can be part of wider ministry by working with other Christians, particularly but not only Christians in the Baptist churches of NSW and the ACT. We can be part of wider ministry by praying. We can be part of wider ministry by giving. Our God is a great God. And one of the ways in which our great God greatly blesses us is by inviting us to be a part of many ministries, ministries which begin here at Eastwood but which stretch across our city, and our state, and our nation, and even into far corners of our world.