

Record of Service – Rev Dieter Engler

I was born in West Berlin in 1958. West Berlin was a small island of freedom in Communist East Germany. Coming to Australia in 1959, allowed my family to escape its uncertainties and the memories of recent war and personal tragedies. I arrived in Adelaide as a one-year-old. After moving around, the family settled on an apple orchard in Ashton in the Adelaide Hills where I attended Norton Summit Primary School (1964–70) and then Urrbrae High (1971–74) before completing Matriculation at Norwood High (1975). My family were not practising Christians, so I had no idea of God or the Christian faith until in Year 10 I chanced across a lunch time Bible class run by the woodwork teacher Mr Schultz (senior), where I heard for the first time about Jesus. Knowing almost nothing about Jesus I nonetheless invited him into my heart at a school speech night (no altar call, just a feeling that life was empty and meaningless at that time). From then on, I knew I had a relationship with Jesus who I then discovered not only gave my life meaning but also saved me from a sudden sense of my sinfulness and lostness.

I really only wanted to be an artist so my move to Norwood High was to do year 12 art. However, after failing to gain entry into North Adelaide Art School I was accepted into the Art Teacher Training Course at then Torrens College of Advanced Education. It was there that I really began to read the bible and discover the wonderful benefits and excitement of the Christian life, becoming president of the Christian Fellowship group, run under the care of AFES and doing much evangelising on campus with all its challenges and persecutions. In 1979 with only a Diploma of Teaching in hand I began a career as an art teacher at Clare High School. By then I had met and married Mary White through attending Summertown UC. Mary also took up work in the Mid-North as a Speech Therapist with the Education Dept. In Clare we were very involved in the Clare UC, myself teaching and running the Sunday School, preaching, eldership and both of us running the town's inter-denominational youth group. As well as all that we had 5 children in Clare, our last son suddenly and tragically dying on Fathers' Day in 1991 from meningitis at the age of 11 weeks. This period was a time of great testing for me, not because of any lack of trust in God's goodness or plan for me, but simply dealing with grief and loss.

At this same time we moved back to the Adelaide Hills settling on Mary's family property at Carey Gully and resuming worshipping, eldership and preaching at Summertown UC. After some dissatisfaction with teaching and a longing to pursue an art career, I resigned from teaching in 1994 and took up being a full-time visual artist. This was not a sudden thing as I had only ever been part time in teaching so had felt God's blessing in being able to pursue my art practice alongside paid work. While the move to full-time artist was very successful to begin with, the demands of exhibiting across Australia and overseas eventually took its toll, especially combined with a very sporadic and uncertain income.

It was into this mix of an active church life of preaching, Sunday School, eldership etc and the artist's life that I received a clear and strong call to "be a minister in the Uniting Church" in 2007. The call

came with a great sense of urgency and resolve and I quickly began a period of discernment and was accepted as a candidate for Minister of the Word, completing my study requirements by the end of 2010. 2011 saw me in a student placement at Rosefield UC where I was graciously supported by the congregation and the Rev Phil Hoffman who became an ongoing mentor. Other ministers who played a significant role during that time included Rev Greg Walker, Rev Greg Pearce and Rev Dr Ross Gaskin. Along with 6 others, I was ordained in 2012, taking up a 0.5 placement at Mitcham Village Uniting Church. This was to be my one and only placement before I retired in 2025.

Mitcham Village UC proved an ideal placement for me as next door (as part of the Village) was Gallery One, a community run art gallery and workspace. Over the years I became quite involved in this second “congregation”, co-running for 10 years an Easter exhibition titled Life@death. It was a venue for people of all persuasions to express ideas that were vital in their lives and in our culture, exploring issues of life, death, truth, loss, and more and by casting a wide net over many art forms including paintings, sculpture, film, dance and even flower arranging and cooking.

Mitcham Village UC was a typical small and ageing congregation, struggling to feel relevant in the face of an uncertain future and seemingly diminishing personal resources. My time there saw them transform into a lively, community-reaching congregation, who were no younger or larger, but had come to realise with God’s help that they could offer the community something. This something was in the form of hiring out its premises, offering them pastoral care and inviting them into the life of the congregation, an op-shop that became part community run and a community vegetable garden that again reached well into the local community, offering opportunities for volunteer work and learning opportunities. All of these, along with the Gallery connections, provided real community contact and meaningful opportunities for members of the congregation, some of whom had experienced a sense of lostness previously.

During my time at Mitcham Village I became chair of the local School Ministry Support Group, convenor for the local minister’s support network and discovered great joy in pastorally caring for people, in the congregation, at the Gallery, in the local nursing homes and whoever came across my path.

I had come to an ‘agreement’ with God that I would retire at 67 which I did. Mary also retired on the same weekend from a career in schools, as a speech therapist, Pastoral Care Worker and School assistant. We are now beginning a new chapter in our lives together serving Christ where he now calls. We have resumed worship at Summertown UC and look forward to travel, family time, art and serving God.

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24 April 2026