

CENTREPIECE

February—March 2026

Free but donations are helpful

Look back on Christmas 2025

Draw Near in Lent

The Lament of a Frustrated Declutterer

Lent Appeal

New Chasubles—gift from the Friends

Lisa Richer



Saint \oplus Mary
in Stafford

~~St~~affordChurches

Saint Chad : Collegiate Church of Saint Mary : Saint Leonard

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PARISH ADMINISTRATOR /PARISH OFFICE

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Email: parishoffice@stmarysstafford.org.uk

For Baptisms and Weddings:
Please contact the Parish Administrator

Monday 11am—3pm
Tuesday 11am—3pm
Wednesday 11am—3 pm
Thursday 11am—3pm
Friday 11am—4pm

SERVICES IN STAFFORD CHURCHES

Usual weekly services

The three Parishes Eucharist on Sundays
8.30am at Saint Chads
10.00am at Saint Mary's

Tuesdays at noon in St Mary's

Wednesdays at 11.00am in St Chad's

Fridays at noon in St Chad's

First Sunday of the month at 10.00: a service at Saint Leonard's, Marston

There is a weekly newssheet sent out by email. If you are not receiving this and would like to, please contact the Parish Office.



From the Editors

Well Christmas is over for another year and life has returned to normal (if there is such a thing). In this edition we look back on Christmas at St Mary's and enjoy a selection of photos from that time. Fr John would have won the Christmas jumper competition if we had one (see page 7).

Looking forward, we are preparing for Lent and Easter next.

Hope you like the wonderful picture on the front cover, a rather different image of St Mary's! Thank you Lisa Richer for sending it to us. It is now available to buy as a greetings card.

*If you have something interesting to share with us —please do.
It's always nice to hear from different people.*

Steve and Dee Turner

steveanddeeturner@yahoo.co.uk

From The Musing Ministers

Dear Friends,

It's nine months since we said goodbye to the previous Rector. While the months may have passed quickly or slowly, depending on your point of view, a child could have been conceived and delivered within the same time !

The period between one incumbent leaving and another arriving is traditionally called the Interregnum. It's from the Latin and is best translated as "between reigns." It's a reminder that clergy once tended to act like kings. When the Rector said "Jump" the only proper response was " How high Father?" Even the papal crown is now confined to the Vatican Museum. How things have changed.

We are now encouraged to use the word Vacancy to speak about the time without an incumbent. This has a different feel and brings with it the hope that in a Vacancy the ministry of the local church will continue and may even thrive. It's also the time when we are asked to think about what sort of church we are and what sort of church we might like to be and the qualities we are looking for in a new Rector to help us fulfil our vision.

All this takes some considerable effort. The days of the old Rector going out of the back door as the new Rector arrives by the front door are gone.

Identifying priorities for the future and dealing with the legalities of an appointment involves a huge amount of attention to detail. The Church Councils who undertake this work deserve our support and prayers. We must be patient but also hopeful of a good outcome.

The daily ministry of our churches continues. There are services (some 200 since May) and there are baptisms, weddings and funerals to be taken with the usual preparation and pastoral support. There are also buildings to be kept in good order. The Christmas Tree Festival was a great success and the planning of the Summer Festival is under way. We also try not to forget the needs of the less fortunate and the charities which we support.

I'm intrigued by the thought that our Vacancy is presently equal to a full term pregnancy. It begs the question, can we expect to see anything new happening before the arrival of the next incumbent? It used to be said that nothing much could be expected during an Interregnum. It was rather a sad time but perhaps a Vacancy is different. The challenge is to remain alert and positive.

A Vacancy may well see ideas which have been dormant beginning to flourish. We can but hope that in the months ahead we shall see developments in the life of our churches which are consistent with the faithful witness we have borne at the heart of Stafford over many years. A congregation which looks to the future is going to be more appealing to a potential incumbent than one which has allowed things to be set in aspic.

A number of things are stirring . Our congregations are steadily growing. A number of adult baptisms have recently taken place and there is a growing interest in Bible Study. The Bishop of Stafford will be visiting 8th March to conduct a Confirmation Service. We have also been pleased to welcome people from overseas who have chosen to make Stafford their home. It's good to see that we reflect a little more the wonderful diversity of God's people.



It's certainly a compliment to hear people say that things are going well but the gentle enquiry " how are you coping?" is equally appreciated.

Our wardens, clergy, reader, administrator, director of music and other leaders do so much on your behalf and while the work is rewarding a word of thanks is always welcome.

With best wishes,

Michael

2025 Christmas Tree Festival

Another very successful Christmas Tree festival was held at St Mary's Stafford between 3rd and 9th December 2025.

105 real Christmas trees were on display, each beautifully decorated by many organizations and businesses. Each tree was different, interesting and at times thought provoking. One was decorated with feather boas and received many comments.

During the festival 50 people helped welcome and steward 6,000 visitors safely around the church. Drinks, warm mince pies and delicious home-made cakes were served to visitors by a team of 17 volunteers. 22 schools and music groups performed throughout the festival. We had 3 evening concerts by St Mary's Singers (sponsored by Friends of St Mary's), Fish from Oblivion and VocaBella & Rock choir.

Donations raised during the festival will be used to support the work in St Mary's and for Mayor Jenny Barrons chosen charities.

Val Westerman, lead for this festival wishes to thank everyone who volunteered, helped and supported before, during or after the festival. Without you we could not hold this event for so many visitors to enjoy. Plans have already started for 2026 Christmas Tree festival, but watch out for our summer festival first.

Thank you, Stafford!



Advent, Christmas and Epiphany at St Mary's

Sue Savage

As always, from the end of November to the beginning of January, is a very busy period for us all.

Advent started with our carol service: From Darkness to Light and the lighting of the first Advent candle. This service was well attended and much appreciated.

The first event of December is our famous, or infamous, Christmas Tree Festival. You will have read about this elsewhere in the magazine. Fortunately, this year the road system was not quite so bad around Stafford as it had been in 2024 and the weather was kinder. This meant we had more visitors than last year and consequently incoming funds were higher.

No sooner had we packed away and cleaned after the trees than we were welcoming people to carol services: Stafford Grammar School, The WI, The Scouts, The Emergency Services, the Stafford branch of the Newcastle and Stafford College Group and, of course the Civic Carol Service. Add to this the Christmas Cracker event for children and Come and Sing carols and you can see that clergy, wardens, musicians and verger were rarely away from the building.

Stafford Choral have made St Mary's their home for their annual performance of Messiah and it was good to see a very full church for this event.

Next comes the preparation for our Christmas services: altar frontals to be changed and all linen for all altars and credence tables. Not to mention the flowers, so beautifully done by Sue Davis, and the putting out of the various crib figures.

Christmas Eve is Christingle at 4pm and then Midnight Mass. Back at 10am on Christmas Day for the service then. All these services were very well attended and many only visit us on these occasions.

Some folk told me I could have a rest over the period between Christmas and New Year but I had PCC reports to write and also continue work on the Parish Profile!

We had an extremely successful December, welcoming around 8000 visitors over the various events. This would not be possible if it were not for all the volunteers who give of their time and expertise.

Thank you to everyone who helped in any way.

If you think January is quiet – we've already celebrated Epiphany and will have our Epiphany Carols. This will be followed by the Crown Court Service and the Holocaust Memorial Service and all while we continue to keep the wheels turning and the interregnum going.

Not long now until Ash Wednesday and then Easter.

A selection of photos from the December events. Photos from Paul Milgate-Scarrott.



CENTREPIECE 7

Draw Near in Lent

Helen Emery, the diocese's Whole Life Discipleship Officer is excited about ways of adding meaning to Lent this year.

- Opening the curtains each morning and seeing the light which floods the room as God flooding my day with His light of love.
- Savouring the first sip of coffee I take, thanking God for the joyful flavour and asking to be shown joy in whatever the day has ahead.
- Seeing my shower as a mini – baptism preparing me for the day head.
- Using my commute to work or my drive to the supermarket as an opportunity to pray for those I will encounter there.
- Asking God to take away any rubbish which is not helpful in my life as I take the bins out each week.

These are all ways of infusing our everyday habits with deeper, life-giving meaning. It is nothing new – these are all suggestions I have heard over the years from fellow disciples on the faith journey. I am sure you have similar habits which can turn into tiny yet significant rituals.

The challenges for me – as a disciple and in my role as Whole life Discipleship officer for Lichfield Diocese – is to take the big picture of what I believe about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the mind-blowing, eternal significance of it, the heart-swelling enormity of it – and ensure it makes a different to the tiny detail of my every day, ordinary, here and now life. However you do that – whether it be through actions and re-actions, prayers and practicalities – I believe it is the essence of lent.

Self-examination, repentance and sacrifice.

For Lent 2026, resources published from Church House will be under the banner of “Draw Near: Life-giving habits for Lent”. So this theme of building our ‘rhythms of life’ – habits and patterns which help us grow as disciples of Christ day by day – is particularly current.

The booklet and app will focus on 6 aspects - worshipping together, praying, exploring the Bible, sharing communion, offering service and sharing the good news with others.

So I invite you this lent to join me in striving to bring our discipleship that little bit more into the ‘whole of life’ - and seeing the transformation it can bring to our relationship with God, ourselves and each other.

Look out for the ‘Draw Near’ resources on the Church of England’s various channels: www.cofe.io/DrawNear and join in on social media channels (@thechurchofengland and the ‘Everyday Faith’ app on smartphones. Do talk to Helen for suggestions and help helen.emery@lichfield.anglican.org

Pancake Party
Tuesday 17th February
5.30pm-7.00pm
at St Mary's
For children and
families
of the three parishes

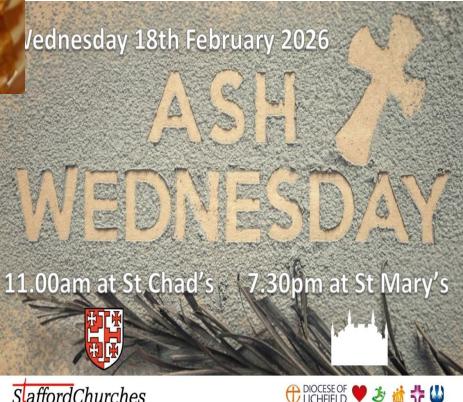


Easter

Easter is early this year with Easter Sunday being April 5th, so make sure that you have Ash Wednesday, Lent, Holy Week and Easter in your diary.

First event, especially for children and their families is the Pancake Party on Shrove Tuesday.

If you would like to come to the Pancake Party, please let Margaret Outen know. Call 01785 253182, or email parishoffice@stmarysstafford.org.uk



***We join together every week day morning
at 9 am online to say Morning Prayer and
we would love you to join us!
Just one day or five, and join just to listen
or to take part.
It is a wonderful way to start the day!***

Interested?

***Contact Rev. Pam Merriott (pamamerriott@gmail.com)
or Ruth Duffy. (r.m.duffy@me.com)***

Stafford Green Arts Festival

There is No Planet B Stafford returns to St Chad's Church during February half-term week. Centred on environmental and sustainability topics, it offers a selection of complimentary workshops for schools, lesson plans and materials for independent use.

The week will have beautiful environmental art work on display with positive messages on how we can look after our planet and many other important topics. Art displays are put together by local schools, community groups and charities and environmental groups. There will be art and craft activities for families to enjoy with our committee, local Artists, local organisations charities and community supporters.

The opening ceremony will be on Saturday 14 February with music and dancing. The festival has been running for over ten years now, if you haven't seen it yet, please do drop in.

‘There Is No Planet B’
Stafford Green Arts Festival
Environmental Art Exhibition
St. Chad’s Church, Stafford

14th to 21st February 2026

An Exhibition of
artwork, photography, poetry
craft workshops

Free Entry!

For More Information: noplanetbstafford.blogspot.com
or www.facebook.com/noplanetb

Opening times:

Saturday 14th February - 10am-4pm

Monday 16th February - 11am-3pm

Tuesday 17th February - 11am-3pm

Wednesday 18th February - 12 noon-3pm

Thursday 19th February - 11am-3pm

Friday 20th February - 11am-3pm

Saturday 21st February - 10am-3pm

Holocaust Memorial Day

Holocaust Memorial Day fell on Tuesday 27 January and was commemorated at St Mary's with an evening service. This annual occasion is dedicated to remembering the six million Jewish people who died during the Holocaust, as well as all victims of genocide—those who lost their lives due to persecution in World War II and other genocides throughout history.

The theme for Holocaust Memorial Day 2026, 'Bridging Generations', is a call-to-action. A reminder that the responsibility of remembrance doesn't end with the survivors - it lives on through their children, their grandchildren and through all of us.

This theme encourages us all to engage actively with the past - to listen, to learn and to carry those lessons forward. By doing so, we build a bridge between memory and action, between history and hope for the future. Bridging Generations highlights the crucial role of the next generation in preserving the memory of the Holocaust and carrying it forward.

Some lit a candle to remember those who were lost, and placed it in their window.

As candles flickered in windows across the nation, we created a collective light against darkness – remembering those we lost and reaffirming our commitment to stand against hatred and prejudice.

**Dates for next
QUIET MONDAYS
at Shallowford House**

**9 February, 9 March, 13 April
10.00 am to 3.30 pm**

a gentle day of devotion, quiet time and worship

£28 including lunch
To book call 01785 760233

Further information about these Quiet Days from Sheila Young

St Mary's One World Group Lent Appeal 2026



Hospice Care Kenya has recently announced an exciting new project **Joanna's House, Nairobi** which aims to reach many more children and families with life-changing palliative care and psychosocial support.

The **Joanna's House** project provides safe, temporary accommodation in Nairobi for patients and caregivers travelling long distances for cancer treatment at Kenyatta National Hospital. The Hospice Care Kenya website reports:

“With our support, Joanna's House provided room, board, meals, and transport to 20 patients, many of whom stayed for extended periods to complete radiotherapy or other treatments. For patients facing long journeys and the high cost of accommodation in the city, this safe and supportive place made all the difference. Without this support, many would have had no choice but to go without treatment altogether.”

We have received 5 copies of the Hospice Care Kenya newsletter for Winter 2025-2026. They are located at the back of the church. Feel free to browse or borrow and explore how your generous donations help those with life-limiting conditions and their families.

It costs an average of just £27 to provide care to each of those helped by HCK, giving compassionate care, pain relief and emotional support.

Please consider making a donation this Lent, enabling HCK to reach more adults and children in need of life-changing palliative care.

Donation envelopes, available at the back of St Mary's, can be returned during Lent.

Additional ways to give include:

Cheques payable to St. Mary's Church Stafford

A card reader is available in St. Mary's

or

To pay direct to the bank use these details:

Account name: The PCC of the Ecclesiastical Parish of Stafford St. Mary

Ref: HCK Account No: 00032434 Sort Code: 40 52 40

All donations will be sent to the charity.

Further details of the work of HCK are on the One World Group noticeboard in the North Transept in St. Mary's, in the HKC Summer Newsletter, or on the website Hospice Care Kenya Charity

Stafford Food Banks.

Christian Food Help and House of Bread support households in Stafford struggling with food insecurity. Donation boxes will remain at St Chad's and St Mary's. All non-perishable foods are appreciated at this critical time, when rising fuel bills impact households already struggling to buy food. Tinned meals, puddings and long-life milk are especially needed.

Donations of toiletries would be welcomed by House of Bread.

CHORAL EVENSONG

The Collegiate Church of **Saint Mary** *in Stafford*

Sunday 8th February
6.30pm at St Mary's

The Choir of the Collegiate Church
Director of Music: Margaret Outen
Organist: Tim Sagar

StaffordChurches.uk
Saint Chad : Collegiate Church of Saint Mary : Saint Leonard

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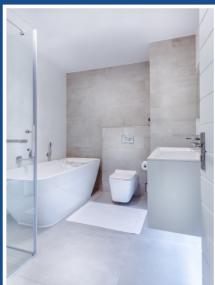
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Saturday Morning Coffee Concerts at St Mary's



Feb 14	Tbc
Feb 28	Simon Fitzgerald (organ)
March 14th	The Operettes
March 28th	Young Performers Showcase
April 11th	Tim Sagar (organ)

All concerts begin at 11:00am

Doors open 10:30am when tea and coffee will be available
All are welcome Admission free but donations very welcome!



Tuesday 17 February 2026

A Bit of a Carry On

Lecturer Tyler Butterworth

The remarkable untold story of Carry On actor Peter Butterworth and his wife Janet Brown.

Tuesday 17 March 2026

Queens, Consorts and Courtiers:

Female Art Patrons in late Stuart England

Lecturer Amy Lim

In an era when married women's property automatically belonged to their husbands, could women still play a role as patrons of the arts?

Venue is Stafford Gatehouse Theatre at 1.45pm.

Membership for the year starting on April 1st costs just £60 for 10 lectures.

Guest attendance fee is £10

For more information please see our website: www.theartssocietystafford.org.uk

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New Chasubles for St Mary's

The Churchwardens and Clergy of St Mary's are delighted that the Friends of St Mary's have purchased for the church, a complete set of Chasubles and matching Stoles for use during Eucharistic Services.

The set is in the four liturgical colours for use during the church year, White, Red, Purple and Green. Those of you attending church in recent weeks will have seen the White Chasuble in use, and I am sure will think what beautiful garments they are.

The set have been made by a clerical clothing company in India, who specialise in making garments like these.



We are extremely grateful to the Friends of St Mary's for purchasing these for us, which will enhance our worship. The Friends do so much for our church in providing items the church would not be able to afford. If you are not a member of the Friends, do please consider joining, it only costs £10 for membership each year, but your membership will make an enormous difference to our beautiful church.

Leaflets explaining what the Friends do are available in church.

Father John

***For more information or to join the Friends please contact Dee on
friendsoftsmary@gmail.com or fill in the leaflet found at the back of the
church and leave it with the steward or in the Parish Office. Thank you.***

R N Clarke

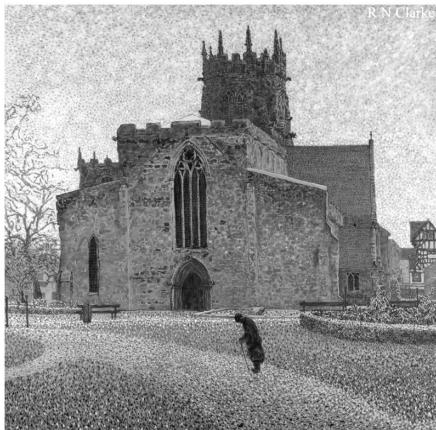
Paintings, drawings and
watercolours of
R N Clarke

Gallery address

R N Clarke Fine Art
Suite No1, St Mary's Mews,
St Mary's Place,
Stafford ST16 2AP

The Gallery is Open by Appointment
please telephone 07874 708372
or email
richard.n.clarke@outlook.com

The Gallery also holds occasional
Open Days



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The Lament of a Frustrated Declutterer

Fr Michael Newman

I recently came across some thoughts which are printed below. It's somewhat "tongue in cheek" but may well strike a chord in the hearts of all who strive to keep our churches clean and tidy.

* * * * *

"Removed from the church today six Christmas cards unopened, a broken umbrella, a baby's dummy, an odd glove and a number of cardboard boxes." Dear God why are so many cardboard boxes delivered but never taken away!"

It could be worse. Continental churches are full of clutter of a superior sort. Veils of virgin martyrs, enough fragments of the true cross to build the ark, macabre body parts of the local saint and crutches cast aside by pilgrims after prayer. Thank God for small mercies!

Why is it that we surround ourselves with so much clutter when we need so little in heaven? Angels for example often appear to be scantily clad. Semi naked cherubs in white garments holding harps in their hands. Angels are privileged to contemplate God's glory without distraction.

Quite possibly we are "entertaining angels unawares." (Hebrews 3v2). Each week cups are found in the bowl unwashed. We are not alone. Angels take great care to polish their halos but washing up may be too much to expect. This is clearly the responsibility of mere mortals.

Our world by way of contrast is so different to the heavenly realm. Yet could it be that God speaks to us through the flotsam and jetsam that life throws in our way? Even through the crockery left in the sink? "Mea Culpa" I must plead humility in this matter. I have no wish to offend.

Paddy in his youth had not a cup or saucer to his name. He treasured a particular jam jar (by coincidence jam jars are often left in churches). He used it to collect soup in his jar from the Salvation Army. He once brought his jar to church and spoke movingly about its significance in his life. It's a reminder that one man's rubbish is another man's gold. God blesses people in the most unlikely ways.

A thought has just come to mind. Is it possible that relics, if not exactly rubbish, are the things left in churches by mistake, which with the passing of time become objects of veneration? All the cardboard boxes must have been left around for some reason. God has strange ways of redeeming our indolence.

In the meantime we must pray for grace and for the coming of the day when we can all declutter our lives and become more like the angels."

* * * * * I

I can certainly testify that I feel so much better having just cleared 15 bin bags of rubbish from the clergy vestry! I commend decluttering as an exercise which is as good for the soul as it is for satisfying the requirements of health and safety.

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We would like to thank all of you who supported us at the Christmas Tree Festival. We took £2000 on the stall so many thanks go to those who purchased, donated and helped to man the stall. The calendars sold out and we sold a huge number of Christmas cards.

We already have some fantastic snowy photos for next year's Christmas card! All the money raised goes to St Mary's, our most recent gift being the new chasubles (p17).

And a special thank you goes to St Mary's Singers for the fabulous concert they put on for us—definitely a highlight of the Christmas Tree Festival.



St Mary's as you've never seen it before!

Introducing our newest greetings card—strikingly different! It was designed by Lisa Richer who said “I was at the coffee concert and was taken by the craftsmanship of the prayer cushions, their colours and texture. I took a photo and had a play with it. I've called it 'Stained Glass Threads', hope you like it”.

Yes we do like it ! The card is on sale at the back of the church and in Snapddragon just opposite the church.

Donation to Mayor's Charities

St Mary's was very pleased to be able to give £1000 to the Mayor's charities.

The cheque was presented to Stafford Mayor, Cllr Jenny Barron at the Civic Carol Service.

This came from donations made at the Christmas Tree Festival, so thank you to all who donated.



Stafford Mayor Cllr Jenny Barron with Church-warden Sue Savage and Alderman Ray Barron

The Soup Kitchen



This beautiful 16th Century eating house offers the ideal place to meet your friends and is described in The Times as "Stafford's hidden gem". Visitors from all over the world regularly return and comment 'there is nowhere else that compares in atmosphere, traditional old-fashioned service and genuine warm welcome which is unique to Stafford's Soup Kitchen.'

Church Lane Antiques



A wide selection of antiques for sale, including furniture, pictures, pottery, glass, silver and jewellery.

We are always interested in buying; from single items to house clearance.

32 Mill Street
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Tel: 07770 870140 or 07795 023857
Email: lizlyd@googlemail.com

Open Friday & Saturday
10am-4pm

CHURCH CONTACTS

St. Mary's

Churchwardens.....Sue Savage

Churchwardens.....Paul Milgate-Scarrott

Bellringers.....Selwyn Jones..... 242116

One World Group.....Pauline Roycroft .. 244556

Julian Meeting.....Sheila Young..... 252023

Director of Music.....Margaret Outen....253182
Email: margaretouten@hotmail.co.uk

Planned Giving Secretary....Chris Bown..... 229192
..... Email: chrisbown@btinternet.com

St. Chad's

Churchwardens.....Ian Carr.....07714913079

St. Leonard's

ChurchwardenGail Wray01889 271176

WEBSITES:



Website for StaffordChurches: www.staffordchurches.uk



St Mary's Website: www.stmarysstafford.org.uk

St. Chad's Website: www.stchadsstafford.co.uk

Why not follow us on Twitter? @staffordchurch

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Email steveanddeeturner@yahoo.co.uk



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At St. Mary's, children can enjoy a safe environment where
they can learn to sing while having fun and expressing
themselves freely, all under the guidance of an experienced
musical director.

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 Parishoffice@stmarysstafford.org.uk

StaffordChurches
Saint Chad · Collegiate Church of Saint Mary · Saint Leontius

Contributions to Centrepiece:

If you would like to advertise an event, comment on one you have attended or just share something interesting with us- then please do so.

*Email us at: steveanddeeturner@yahoo.co.uk
Deadline is about 10 days before the first Sunday of the month.*