

I CAME ACROSS Don Giuliano several years ago while looking for an English speaking priest in the Gradara area. He is based about 30 minutes away but as soon as I said 'service in English' he was jumping for joy. He has relatives in the USA and often visits them so he speaks great English and loves to be able to use it whenever he can.

I went to meet him and from the first minute he was full of fun and not at all stuffy and what I imagined priests to be. He took me to look at his new church and was laughing his socks off as he showed me his new toy: the confession box with an air conditioning unit. 'It often gets a bit hot in there,' he said laughing. As we talked, I really



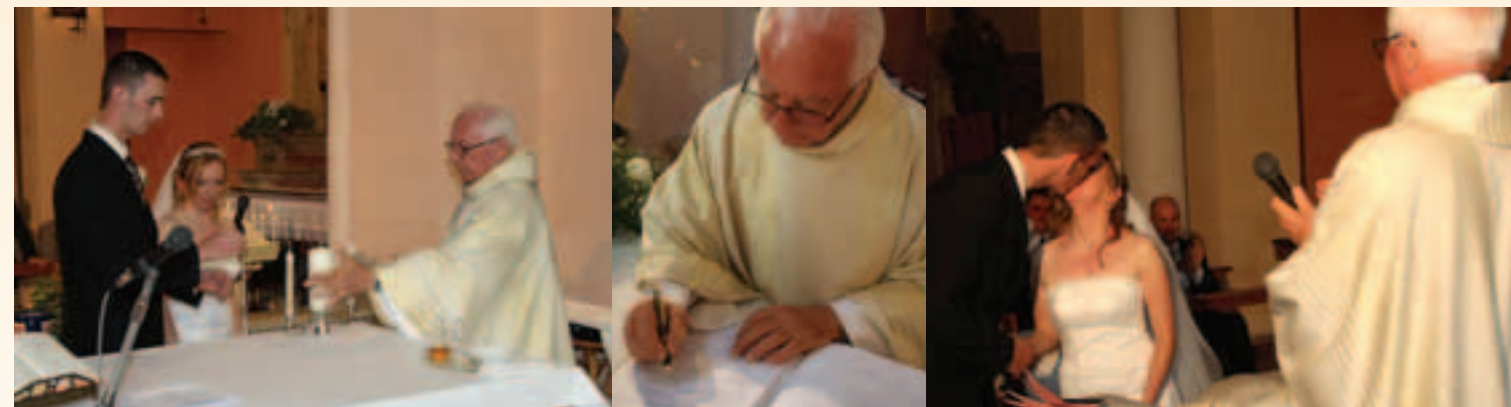
got the feeling that he loves what he does and loves his flock too. Every year he arranges a trip to Lourdes with them and has also even been as far as Las Vegas and California with them. When I asked him what he thought about Vegas he was whooping with joy and said, 'Fantastic place.' He is really modern-minded in his approach and has twinkling eyes that are just completely full of mischief and the joys of life.

Last year he came to Gradara and did the wedding ceremonies for some of my Irish couples. He met with them before and was very serious regarding the official side of things regarding the correct paperwork and so on. He also changed the wording in some places in the mass. For example he wanted the groom to say, 'I receive you as my wife.' 'I think the word *take* is far too hard and lacking in romance," he said. 'It sounds like you are about to reach out and grab each other by the hair.' So he's changed the words and 'I receive you' it now is.

LAPSING INTO THE VERNACULAR

When he came to do the services he was so loving and warm towards the couples, hugging them as they came into church and putting them all at ease with a lovely smile and always a little something to make them chuckle. He also spoke to their guests with words of welcome in Irish including the Lord's Prayer in Irish which got him a standing ovation. Yes, a standing ovation and applause in the church!

He also introduced the communion wine by telling all and sundry that it was good wine from Sicily and not just some cheap plonk. I almost fell off my pew. At another wedding, the photographer was taking pictures of the couple as they stood at the altar after the ceremony and I suddenly saw Don G pop out of view under his robe. 'He's looking for a tissue,' I thought. But no, out came his digital camera and he started snapping away too. Then as we got outside the church I caught him telling everyone that his gown was a little Dolce & Gabbana designer number. By this time of course I was uncontrollable.



Getting married in a Catholic ceremony in Italy is not difficult...

He attended the receptions and stayed well into the evening, sitting amongst the guests, keeping them in awe at his many wonderful stories of places he has visited and also had them in fits of giggles at his expressions. Everyone wanted him at their table. I have promised him a trip to Dublin soon as he wants to go and visit his happy couples and check that they are happy and well.

I have asked Don G if he will come and do some weddings for me this year in Verona and the beautiful Valpolicella region and he is delighted to do so. 'My flock will all be on the beach in July so why not?' he said happily.

ATTRACTIONS OF THE RECEPTION

So he will be coming to the *Duomo* in Verona and then back to the lovely Villa Giona for the reception. 'You put me down for that one,' he said enthusiastically when he heard where the venue was, 'They make great wine at Villa Giona and I've heard the food is amazing too!' He will also be coming to the beautiful small church we have in the hills above Lake Garda and again I have the feeling that another trip to the reception in the stunningly beautiful Villa Giona is what is enticing him.

Getting married in a Catholic ceremony in Italy is not difficult and so I would say don't listen to some websites who even say, 'It is sometimes, but very rarely, possible.'

You will also find that many priests do not want to turn the service into a money-making exercise and really do put the emphasis on the spiritual side as it should rightly be.

However, if you are both or just one of you is of the Catholic faith then it is very easy to arrange, with the help of a good wedding planner, to find the right priest for the job.

Like anything else, the paperwork must be in order and it can often be a bit of a headache for a wedding planner, as priests

don't tend to have large offices. They may also move from church to church and are perhaps not the most organised of people. However, a wedding planner who loves getting their teeth into things and will go that extra mile for you will be able to provide you with a beautiful and moving service in some of the most amazing churches for which Italy is so famous.


SORTING THE PAPERWORK

The documents you will need for the religious part will be dealt with by your own parish priest, who will send the paperwork to the *Diocesi* in the area where you are going to be married. They will then be passed on to the church you are marrying in. The religious ceremony in Italy can also be valid in a civil way. This is a simple process which involves the reading of articles 143-144-147 of the Italian Civil Code at the end of the religious ceremony.

Apart from the religious documents, which will include copies of your baptism, first communion, confirmation certificates and

so on, which your parish priest will take care of, you will both require a *Nulla Osta* which is issued by the relevant British Consulate or Irish Embassy in Italy.

Our religious weddings are always so moving and by adding a string quartet and a soprano singing *Ave Maria*, there is never a dry eye in the house. Add Don Giuliano to the equation and there will be both tears of joy and laughter at the same time.

When I call him, he is always just so full of joy and fun. Before Christmas I took him a bottle of delicious *Amarone* made on the Villa Giona estate and when I said it was for his communion wine he said: 'Are you crazy? This is for me.' He is an absolute joy to meet and spending time in his company leaves you not only spiritually uplifted but also with sore sides at some of his antics. He is truly one in a million and we all love him to bits. 

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We meet a priest who brings life, love, fun and lots of laughter into Italian wedding services

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