

QUINCE AÑOS CELEBRATION

The origin of Quinceañeras is uncertain but many believe that the custom derives from Mayan and Toltec fertility rites in which fathers presented their marriageable daughters to the tribe. The young women were viewed as a vital force in the community because of their ability to give warriors to the tribe. The ceremony emphasized the ladies' commitment and responsibilities to the community as women.

In history the custom seems to have evolved into a combination of a birthday party and a debut within a religious context. The Church adopted and baptized the custom stressing the dignity and Christian vocation of a young lady.

A Quinceañera, therefore, can be described as a celebration of an Hispanic young lady's fifteenth (15) birthday, a time in which she is presented to society and publicly proclaimed to be no longer a child. It can be considered a ceremony of transition from childhood to womanhood. As such, the young lady is now expected to accept some of the responsibilities of an adult in society and church.

Although some liken the modern day festivities to the coming out parties of debutantes, the celebration is not. The religious ceremony of a Quinceañera recognizes a young lady's rite of passage into womanhood through a renewal of her commitment to God.

This ceremony can also be celebrated for a young man on his fifteenth (15) birthday.

The religious celebration of a Quinceañera has its purpose:

1. to give thanks to God for life itself;
2. to offer the young lady the opportunity to express her commitment to Jesus Christ and to the Christian community;
3. to honor the young lady on her fifteenth (15) birthday;
4. to honor the young lady's parents who through God's help brought her into the world.

Requirements and Preparation

1. A Quinceañera is permitted only if the family of the young lady is practicing the Catholic Faith and registered in the parish where the Quinceañera will take place. (If the Quinceañera is to be celebrated outside of the parish of the young lady, her pastor's permission is needed.)
2. A Quinceañera, which includes the religious education component, should be arranged with the parish.
3. The young lady should be active in the youth program of her parish.

Immediate preparation for the celebrations should include:

1. A day of recollection with an opportunity to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation.
2. Attendance at a course of special instruction approved by the Youth Ministry Office of the Diocese of Las Cruces.

The Celebration

It is fitting that the celebration of the Quinceañera begins with the Eucharistic Liturgy in which the parents first present their daughter in the church as an act of thanksgiving and in which the daughter renews her commitment to live the Christian life as she begins adulthood.

It is also fitting that this liturgy have a certain solemnity; however, over the years certain practices have attached themselves to the celebration in the church, destroying much of the religious value and giving too much importance to the externals. Extravagance, competition, and trying to impress others by spending a lot of money are values not compatible with the simplicity of life encouraged in the message of Jesus. The emphasis should be on the young lady and her family giving thanks to God for her desire to take a more responsible role both in society and the church.

Therefore, in order to ensure that the religious ceremony of a Quinceañera is truly festive and free of external extravagances, the following guidelines are to be employed:

1. In parishes where there is a request for many Quinceañeras, communal celebrations several times a year should be the norm.
2. In parishes where there are fewer requests, the pastor may arrange to celebrate individual Quinceañeras or decide to have communal celebrations.
3. In either communal or individual celebrations the young lady is to be accompanied by her parents and/or god-parents of baptism.
4. In individual celebrations the young lady may also be accompanied by other attendants who should be known to her; i.e. personal friends or relatives. (Please note that the chamberlain is not to accompany the young lady in church.)
5. In individual celebrations the number of attendants should be kept to a minimum.
6. The young lady should wear a simple white or other pastel color dress (pink, yellow, lime, lavender). Her dress should in no way resemble a wedding gown.
7. Girl attendants should also wear simple white or other pastel color dresses. Boy attendants should wear dress-up pants, shirt and tie or a suit and tie.
8. During the ceremony the young lady may be presented with a religious medal, a rosary, or a Bible.

9. As a sign of her transition from childhood to adulthood and her commitment to God, the young lady should renew her baptismal vows.
10. The young lady may bring flowers to the statue of Mary.
11. No arches or white runners are permitted in the church.
12. Rice is not thrown either inside or outside of the Church.

Please note that the church highly recommends that parties, receptions, and dances held after the religious ceremony of a Quinceañera be festive and joyful but urges parents to keep expenses moderate in accord with Christian values. No alcoholic beverages will be served in church facilities, and we strongly discourage alcohol being served in other facilities.

APPENDIX

Assistance in celebrating this special occasion within the context of faith, culture, and family can be found in several resources:

Quince Años: Celebrating a Tradition/Celebrando una Tradición

Missionary Catechists of Divine Providence
4650 Eldridge Rd., San Antonio, TX 78237

Religious Celebration for the Quinceañera

MACC
P.O. Box 28185
San Antonio, TX 78228

Guidelines of the Diocese of Phoenix

400 E. Monroe
Phoenix, AZ 85004

Cruzada de Moderación y Caridad Cristiana (Diocese of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico)

Quince Años Celebration (a resource book of the Diocese of Las Cruces for celebrating communal Quinceañeras).