

The Quincinera

What is a Quincinera?

The *Quinceañera*, *Quinceañero*, or *Quince años* ("fifteen years" in English), in Latin American culture, is a coming of age ceremony held on a girl's fifteenth birthday. The term *Quinceaños* refers to the birthday of the celebrant, and the term *Quinceañera* refers to the celebrant herself. The *Quinceaños* is associated with "becoming a lady".

What is the history?

The rite of passage ceremonies into womanhood were practiced among most indigenous people in Mexico prior to the arrival of the Spanish. Many other cultures such as the Jews have coming-of-age ceremonies for boys and girls. In Aztec society boys and girls both began their occupational training at the age of 15. This was also commonly considered the appropriate marrying age for girls.

The ceremony in particular came from Spanish culture during the latter part of the 1800s. In Mexico, this period of the century is called *Porfiriato*, which is comparable to the Victorian era in Anglo-speaking countries. The meaning of the ceremony has changed over the centuries, but the celebration is becoming more popular in the United States than it is in Latin America. In the United States it reflects the family's economic and social status. The ceremony has become a means of preserving their culture as Latinos become more Americanized. *Quincinera* are a unique feature of the Latino culture. Many *Quincinera*'s in the United States have become quite extravagant in costs.

What does the church require?

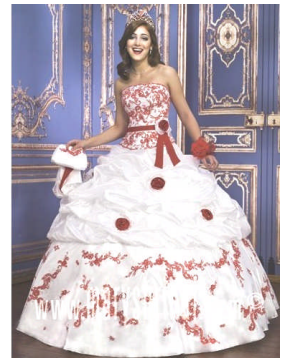
The celebration has significance for Spanish-speaking Catholics – but it should be understood that it is secondary to developing a strong loving relationship with God. The Church has specific requirements such as that she must be a practicing Catholic and has been Confirmed (or preparing for it) to ensure

that she is committed to her faith. Attendance weekly at Mass is expected before and after the event.

The celebration

The celebration can be simple such as a blessing at Mass. An elaborate one is described as follows and may begin with a religious ceremony in which she affirms her faith. It is customary for her to receive gifts that are religious in nature, such as a cross or medal, a Bible, rosary, or scepter – emphasizing the importance of a relationship with God as a practicing Catholic.

Following the Catholic religious ceremony, a reception may be held either in the girl's home or in a banquet hall and often resembles that of a wedding. She carries a doll - representing the last doll of her childhood and is intended to represent her childhood. The girl's father exchanges her flat shoes for heels and the father has her give up her doll, symbolizing the *Quinceañera* girl giving up her childhood and becoming a woman. She will give up also her hair piece, to the next *Quinceañera* to be, and her Godfather will crown her.



This is followed by dances with her father and godfather. Her court is typically composed of her *padrinos* (godparents) and the *Chambelan* - a young man who is her companion and date for the evening. She also must dance a routine dance with the *Chambelanes* - followed by the toast and the cutting of cake. After these initial presentation dances, the guests join the dance floor as well. Godparents play a significant role in the preparations for the *Quinceaños*, and the event shows the godparents' responsibility to oversee the religious upbringing of their goddaughter.