

La Quinceañera

It is difficult to find a birthday celebration anywhere in the world that rivals the way Mexicans and other Latin Americans celebrate the *quinceañera*, a girl's fifteenth birthday. This birthday marks her transition from childhood to womanhood. It is a celebration that combines family, friends, and faith. The word *quinceañera* actually has two meanings. It refers to the fifteenth birthday and also refers to the birthday girl herself. The celebration also typically has two parts: a Catholic mass and a reception that follows.

Much thought and preparation are put into this fiesta as the young lady is presented before the church and community. In the Mexican culture, the *quinceañera* is often dressed to look like a princess. She typically wears an elaborate and beautiful gown. Traditionally, these dresses are formal and have long, full skirts. It is common for the young lady to wear a tiara and have her make-up and hair specially done.

Not only is the young lady prepared outwardly, but she is prepared spiritually. Since the *quinceañera* celebration marks a renewal of her Catholic faith, many young ladies go through classes and preparations within the church before the mass. This mass holds special significance as the young lady's baptismal vows are renewed. Present at the mass are her parents, her *padrinos* (sponsors or godparents), and the court of honor. Similar to the idea of bridesmaids, the court of honor usually consists of 7-14 chosen friends. The girlfriends are called *damas* and the guys are *chambelanes*. The *chambelan de honor* is a young man who is chosen to be her escort, or date for the celebration. It is common for him to be a close friend, cousin or brother. The *padrinos* are friends of the family or relatives who make a commitment to guide the young lady in her faith throughout her life. At the beginning of the mass, the young lady is walked down the aisle by her parents. The court of honor makes a procession to the front of the church also. During the mass, a special blessing is given and communion is taken. The *quinceañera* is often presented with a tiara to wear that represents the crown of life that Christ gives. At the end, she is usually escorted out by the *chambelan de honor*.

After the mass typically comes a dinner or reception with dancing. This can occur at a venue such as a dance hall, restaurant, or someone's house. There is often music and/or a special dance, including a waltz with the young lady and her father. Many times, her father will give a speech expressing love and honor toward his daughter. It is a great time of celebration for the girl and her family as she publically renews her faith and celebrates this momentous birthday.

Questions: La Quinceañera

1. Briefly compare and contrast how the quinceañera is celebrated in the Mexican culture with the way some Americans celebrate their “sweet sixteen”.
2. What does the quinceañera symbolize for a young girl?
3. Briefly describe how a girl traditionally dresses for her quinceañera celebration.
4. Describe the court of honor. Who is in it?
5. Who is the *chambelan de honor*? What is his role in the celebration?
6. What is the purpose of having a mass as part of the quinceañera celebration?
7. Who are the *padrinos*? What role do they play in the quinceañera’s life?
8. What do the young lady and her family and friends do after the mass is over? How do they celebrate?