



Archdiocese of San Antonio

Recommendations for Quinceañeras

Background, Preparation and Liturgical Celebration

Among several Spanish-speaking countries and many Hispanics in the United States there is the custom of celebrating a young woman's passage from childhood to adolescence with a ritual that expresses thanksgiving to God for the gift of life and that asks for a blessing from God for the years ahead. It is an opportunity for the parish to accompany the young woman and her family at an important celebration of their religious and cultural heritage. It expresses our pastoral vision to be realized: **Encountering Christ, United as Church, Sent by the Spirit.**

Part I. BACKGROUND

1. What is a *quinceañera*?

The *quinceañera* is a traditional celebration of life and gratitude to God on the occasion of the fifteenth birthday of a young Hispanic woman. The ritual emphasizes her passage from childhood to adulthood. The family usually requests a Mass and/or a blessing to be held in the Church. The rite is frequently celebrated in several countries in Latin America, including Mexico, and a number of countries in Central, South America and the Caribbean. It is frequently requested by Hispanic Catholics in the dioceses of the United States.

2. What is the origin of the *quinceañera*?

The Native Americans of Meso-America celebrated elaborate rites of passage for their young men and women. Rites of passage are known to have existed in Spain and Portugal as well. The Spanish brought the practice to the Americas. It is possible that the missionaries would have approved of this practice, since these rites closely paralleled Christian practices of initiation and marriage.

3. How is the *quinceañera* celebrated?

In the presence of family and friends, the young woman (the *quinceañera*), often accompanied by a number of young women and men of her choice, (*damas* and *chambelanes*), enters the Church in procession, together with her parents and godparents. If she has prepared the readings, she may serve as the lector for at least one of the readings. After the Liturgy of the Word, the *quinceañera* makes a commitment to God and the Blessed Virgin Mary to live out the rest of her life according to the teachings of Christ and the Church by renewing her Baptismal promises. Then, signs of faith (medal, Bible, rosary, prayer book) which have been blessed may be given to her. A special blessing of the *quinceañera* concludes the Liturgy of the Eucharist. After Mass, the young woman is presented to the community. The ritual continues with a dinner and sometimes a dance in her honor.

4. Who are the participants in the celebration?

The *quinceañera* and a number of young men and women of her choice are joined by members of her family and friends for the celebration. The priest(s) or deacon has a key role as the one who represents the Church and who prays the blessing over the young woman. The local community is also often encouraged to gather for the celebration.

5. May the *quinceañera* take place outside Mass?

The ritual may be celebrated simply, outside Mass with the young woman, accompanied by her parents and godparents, coming before the priest or deacon to receive a special blessing in the Church. Or, there may be a more elaborate celebration with elegant clothes, flowers, music and decorations and with more than one priest or deacon presiding.

6. Why is this included in the Book of Blessings?

The Book of Blessings (*De Benedictionibus*) provides blessings for persons, places, and objects in a wide variety of circumstances and occasions. The *Bendición de la Quinceañera* is proposed for inclusion in Part I: Blessings Directly Pertaining to Persons, alongside orders for the blessing of a family, a married couple, children, sons and daughters, etc.

7. Why is it necessary to have an approved Order of Blessing for this practice?

The traditional blessing, part of the popular devotional practice of many Hispanics and common in a number Latin American countries and the Caribbean, has developed in the

United States into an unofficial “liturgical rite” and is regulated in some dioceses with specific guidelines and norms.

There had been no approved Blessing for the Quinceañera and unapproved “rituals” of a variety of origins were in widespread use in a number of U.S. dioceses. In the absence of a confirmed rite, celebrants often spontaneously created prayers and ritual actions. Since only approved and confirmed rites may be used in the Liturgy, an **Order for the Blessing on the Fifteenth Birthday** was approved by the full body of U.S. Bishops and received the *recognitio* from the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. This is the *Quinceañera* ritual approved for use in the dioceses of the United States of America in 2007. It is bilingual and available through the USCCB website at a nominal cost at <http://store.usccb.org/order-for-the-blessing-on-the-fifteenth-birthday-p/7-024.htm>

8. Why do parents present their daughter for this celebration?

The parents, in coming to the parish Church seeking the blessing, acknowledge that their daughter has reached the age where she is capable of handling additional responsibility. They see the *quince años* Mass as a way to thank God for the blessing of their daughter’s life and to seek God’s blessing and guidance as she enters adulthood. The extended family, (grandparents, godparents, aunts, uncles and cousins) is usually present, to celebrate with the *quinceañera*. *Esponsores* or *padrinos*, other couples acting as sponsors or the young woman’s godparents, may bring forward the blessed religious articles which are presented to the *quinceañera*.

9. What is the positive value of this celebration for the parish?

It is a unique opportunity for the parish to accompany a young woman and her family at an important celebration of their religious and cultural heritage; a number of whom may live in the peripheries of the parish and/or society. This celebration can be an opportune moment to bring the young woman and her family and friends to an encounter with Christ and his Church. It is also an occasion to put into practice the three Archdiocesan Pastoral Priorities; the New Evangelization – providing a shared encounter with Christ with joy and zeal; Catechesis and Formation – providing an opportunity to grow in faith and knowledge of Christ; and Youth and Young Adults – providing an encounter and invitation for the young woman, her friends and family to be disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ. With this type of pastoral outlook, to include a warm and hospitable understanding of the young women and a willingness to meet their needs, the celebration of the *quinceañera* can be a teachable moment for the entire parish and an occasion to practice *pastoral de conjunto*; ministry in communion.

10. Can a parish institute a period of preparation for the *quinceañera*?

Yes. The *quinceañera*, and sometimes the parents, sponsors, even the teens who form part of her celebration, could be asked to participate in a spiritual day of retreat and/or in one or several sessions of preparation and catechesis with talks, activities and prayer, together with the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance, prior to the date of the celebration. The precise form of preparation and recommendations can vary from parish to parish.

Nevertheless, it is important that any preparation not be overly burdensome or difficult for the young woman and her family to complete. A simple blessing, mentioned in point # 5 may not require any particular preparation.

11. Can a parish require an offering for the celebration of a *quinceañera*?

Yes. Though a laudable devotional practice, a *quinceañera* celebration is not a sacrament and the parish may require a specified offering for the use of the church and servers. Guidelines for scheduling these celebrations, as well as for photography, use of flowers, music etc. may also be part of these requirements. Again, these can vary from parish to parish.

12. Why have a *quinceañera* celebration when the Church has the sacrament of Confirmation?

The Sacrament of Confirmation is one of the three sacraments of initiation by which the baptized “are more perfectly bound to the Church... and the Holy Spirit endows them with special strength so that they are more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith, both by word and by deed, as true witnesses of Christ.”¹ The celebration of the *quince años* complements the Sacrament by providing a special blessing for a young Catholic woman as she enters adulthood, preparing her for her new responsibilities. It is an additional opportunity for the Church and parish community to accompany her as well as her family and friends at a distinctive celebration where growth in faith and an encounter with Christ can occur.

Today’s teenagers live in a culture which urges them to embrace “the facile myths of success and power,”². At the time of the celebration of the blessing of the *quinceañera*, a young woman comes to the Church seeking a blessing. Standing before the altar, she is publicly presented and accompanied by her family and friends in a gesture of thanksgiving.

13. Does this celebration sometimes become too costly and extravagant?

It can be. The advantage of living in a country where material things are readily available often encourages families to give into a competitive consumerism and spend exorbitant sums on such celebrations. The same tendency is often seen in the planning of celebrations of the Sacrament of Marriage.

However, as with weddings, many Hispanic families save for years to provide the celebration for their daughter, granddaughter, goddaughter or niece. While to an uninformed observer, the financial expenditure may appear far beyond the means of the family, the reality may be very different. The custom of having *padrinos/madrinas* and *esponsores* makes it possible for there to be a larger array of donated gifts and services. Family members who are seamstresses, musicians, drivers of limousines, florist shop workers, cooks, bakers and photographers often donate their services as gifts. The church decorations, food and music for the fiesta, are often provided by family and friends.

Parishes may also give pastoral guidance in having the celebration for several girls at one Mass, thus focusing more on the liturgy than on any one family, or offering the use of the parish hall for the fiesta which follows. A parish, a parish organization or several parish organizations could sponsor a fiesta following a monthly religious celebration for all the *quinceañeras* of the parish. It is suggested that a time of preparation be set before the date of the celebration so that all participants understand the meaning of the religious celebration and have an opportunity to ready themselves spiritually.

14. How can this celebration be a means of strengthening the faith of Hispanic youth?

Adults have a responsibility to pass on the faith to younger members of the community. The celebration of *quince años* is a crucial time in the life of a young Hispanic woman. While society can invite youth to irresponsible or dangerous behavior, the Church can offer the *quinceañera* an opportunity to reflect on her role as a Catholic Christian woman in a society which often distorts the woman's role.

The *quinceañera* ritual is valuable for the religious message it sends not only to young people, but also to parents, grandparents, godparents and the entire parish in calling them to prayerfully join with youth in making a commitment to God and the Church. It is a privileged encounter with Christ and his Church that can have a lasting impact on the young woman's faith and that of her family.

Church in the United States, soon to comprise the majority of practicing Catholics in this country. The occasion of a *quinceañera* is an opportunity to emphasize the important gift that Hispanics play in the Church in the United States and call them to further involvement and leadership.

15. Why is the rite just for girls?

According to traditional usage, the *Bendición de la Quinceañera* has been a celebration for young Hispanic women. This is the practice in the countries of origin of the young women requesting the blessing. The celebration also can be a strengthening of the identity of the *quinceañera* within her family and as a Catholic, as well as an affirmation of the gift of women as a blessing to the Church. In the Hispanic community, traditionally it has been the women who hand on the faith. Women organize feast days, celebrate rituals and offer prayers. The mother sets up the *altarcito* (small altar) in the home where prayers are offered for the living and the dead. She makes the home a domestic church. Hispanic women are the evangelizers and teachers of values, yet their leadership has often gone unrecognized. The *Quince Años* Blessing publicly acknowledges this historic role.

Recently, in the Western and Southwestern parts of the United States a limited number of young Hispanic males have requested this blessing for themselves. In such cases, a blessing such as or, in one case, twins (male and female), requested a joint celebration. Although there is no basis in the traditional usage for the inclusion of young men in the rite, the *quince años* celebration of a young man can be an opportunity for him and his family and friends to encounter Christ and his Church.

16. Why is the *Bendición de la Quinceañera* presented in English and in Spanish?

In many parishes the young women who come to the church asking for the *Bendición de la Quinceañera* speak only Spanish, others are bilingual, and some of those who were born in this country speak only English. Those participating in the celebration, the parents, godparents, relatives and friends, also share in this linguistic diversity. Many young women who choose the Eucharistic celebration in English and who pray in this language, nevertheless desire to participate in the traditional custom of the *Quinceañera* and prefer that at least some of the celebration be done in English.

¹ Lumen Gentium, no. 11; Cf. Rite of Confirmation, no. 2.

² Pope John Paul II, World Youth Day Address, August, 2005.

Adapted and expanded from "Fifteen Questions on the Quinceañera", USCCB Committee on Prayer and Worship, 2009

PART II – PREPARATION

While *quinceañeras* and their families may be active parishioners wishing to celebrate this milestone in the Church, this event may be a moment of evangelization with current or new parishioners and for this the Church should rejoice. If the *quinceañera* has yet to receive the Sacraments of Initiation, the preparation for this ritual may provide the opportunity for the young woman and her family to encounter Christ like never before. We cannot rush the process of conversion, but can delight in the moment a family asks the Church for a blessing. Through a model of accompaniment, the young person and the family should be invited to explore the Catholic faith more deeply with an intentional invitation for sacramental preparation and/or to be able to enroll in an RCIA process appropriate for them.

Nevertheless, if a young woman and her family are not ready for this step or she has not completed the sacraments of initiation, the quinceañera blessing should not be delayed or declined. The Church has no specific prerequisites for a quinceañera blessing – it need not be a full mass.

Our role as pastoral ministers is to walk with each one, meet them where they are and journey with them toward a relationship in the Lord. Therefore, depending on the request and the circumstances of the young person and her family, the preparation and celebration may be different. Perhaps a simple blessing is given, rather than a full Mass. The precise form of preparation and recommendations can vary from parish to parish, but what should always be included is an environment of welcome and a spirit of accompaniment for the young person and the family. The Archdiocese of San Antonio does not mandate specific requirements for *quinceañera* preparation. Among the more popular *quinceañera* preparation programs successfully used in parishes include:

- The bilingual program *My 15th Birthday/ Mis 15 Años*, published by Pauline Books and Media and available at this link:

<https://paulinestore.com/my-15th-birthday-mis-15-anos-bilingual-3139-115973.html>

[Along with Leader's Guide: https://paulinestore.com/my-15th-birthday-instructors-guide-mis-15-anos-bilingual-3138-115974.html](https://paulinestore.com/my-15th-birthday-instructors-guide-mis-15-anos-bilingual-3138-115974.html)

- The online program Catholic Quince Prep: <http://www.catholicquinceprep.com/>
If the parish wishes not to utilize any of the above-referenced programs it can present its own parish-based *quinceañera* preparation program.

The following are the topics suggested for inclusion in the parish-based *quinceañera* spiritual retreat and/or preparation sessions. Not all topics may be required to celebrate a simple *quinceañera* blessing:

- Encountering Christ
- Spirituality of the *Quinceañera*: Called to Love

- The role of women in God's plan: authentic femininity
- Mary, Mother of Virtue: the perfect role model
- Sacraments and blessings: The Road to Christian Life

PART III – LITURGICAL CELEBRATION

As stated in point #7 in Part I, since only approved and confirmed rites may be used in the Liturgy, an **Order for the Blessing on the Fifteenth Birthday** has been approved for use in the dioceses of the United States since 2007 for liturgical celebrations of the *quinceañera*. It is bilingual and available through the USCCB website at a nominal cost at <http://store.usccb.org/order-for-the-blessing-on-the-fifteenth-birthday-p/7-024.htm>

The readings and prayers used during the liturgy must be taken from the approved liturgical texts. The priest or deacon will always read the Gospel passage. Additional scripture readings can be assigned to other participants. A *quinceañera* blessing may be included during a Sunday liturgy when appropriate. Only if the liturgy is celebrated after 4pm on Saturday afternoon *and* the readings for the following day (Sunday) are used, can dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass be granted for attendees.

It is also important that *quinceañeras*, their families and friends should be briefed regarding the appropriate reverence and dress attire for the celebration to be held in church.

For the Liturgy of the Word, if it is a Sunday, or a Solemnity, the readings of the day must be used; on all other occasions the readings of the day or other readings may be used; here are some suggestions:

Old Testament readings: Jer. 1: 4-10; Is. 6: 1-8

Psalms: 92 (Spanish 91), 100 (Spanish 99)

New Testament: Eph. 1: 3-5; 1 Jn. 4: 7-12

Gospel: Mt. 7: 21-27; Lk. 1: 39-55

When the blessing of the *quinceañera* is celebrated within Mass, the suggested blessing is taken from the Masses for Various Needs and Occasions, For Giving Thanks to God; In Spanish, *Misas por Diversas Necesidades, Para Dar Gracias a Dios*.

There are basically two options for celebrating the blessing of the *quinceañera*, within Mass or within a Liturgy of the Word. Notice that a Communion service is not included. There is a liturgical norm that if Masses are being celebrated nearby, Communion services are not permitted for *quinceañera* observances.

THE ORDER FOR THE BLESSING ON THE FIFTEENTH BIRTHDAY WITHIN MASS

The Introductory Rites

Opening Hymn

Greeting

Penitential Act

Gloria (If it is a solemnity or a feast)

Collect Prayer

The Liturgy of the Word

1st Reading (Old or New Testament)

Responsorial Psalm

Gospel Acclamation

Gospel

Homily

Creed (If it is a solemnity)

The General Intercessions

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

Prayer over the Gifts

The Eucharistic Prayer

The Communion Rite

The Prayer after Communion

The Blessing of the Quinceañera

(Follow the order on pp 14-19 of the **Order for the Blessing on the Fifteenth Birthday**)

The Concluding Rites

The Final Blessing

Sending

Recessional Hymn

**THE ORDER FOR THE BLESSING ON THE
FIFTEENTH BIRTHDAY OUTSIDE MASS**

The Introductory Rites

Opening Hymn

Greeting

The Liturgy of the Word

1st Reading (Old or New Testament)

Responsorial Psalm

Gospel Acclamation

Gospel

Homily

The General Intercessions

Our Father

The Blessing of the Quinceañera

(Follow the order on pp 14-19 of the **Order for the Blessing on the Fifteenth Birthday**)

The Concluding Rites

The Final Blessing

Sending

Recessional Hymn

APPENDIX – An EXAMPLE OF PARISH GUIDELINES FOR QUINCEAÑERAS

Please be aware that this example is provided to serve as an illustration of what a parish may choose – or not – for their *quinceañera* guidelines. This example may be altered to suit a particular parish's needs or situation.

EXAMPLE #1

Quinceañeras

A Quinceañera is a joyous celebration of a young woman — a "Quinceañera" has reached the age of 15.



The celebration is a way of acknowledging the young woman is achieving maturity and is ready to take on additional responsibilities. Most importantly, the celebration reaffirms her religious faith and the traditional virtues of the Catholic family.

There can be two ways to celebrate the quinceañera at this parish:

1. A simple quinceañera blessing outside of Mass with family present. The only requirement is a meeting with the quinceañera coordinator at least 2 months in advance.
2. A full Mass in which the Quinceañera and her family and friends will participate.

In order to celebrate the Quinceañera with a full Mass at this parish:

- The Quinceañera must have received the Sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation (or currently be enrolled in our program to receive Confirmation);
- The Quinceañera must have attended the preparation retreat (usually held in February, May, August and November).

The above items are necessary to schedule a date for a quinceañera Mass. Dates are scheduled six months in advance of the desired celebration. For more information, please contact the parish office and ask to speak to the Quinceañera coordinator.

For Possible Inclusion in the Parish Bulletin:

The *quinceañera* is a traditional celebration of life and gratitude to God on the occasion of the fifteenth birthday of a young women in many cultures. This special blessing may be celebrated simply here at Parish, with the young woman, accompanied by her parents and godparents, coming to receive a special blessing in the Church. Let us accompany you and your family at this special time of your daughter's life! Please contact our *Quinceañera* Coordinator, at _____ at least three months before the celebration.

La quinceañera es una celebración tradicional con motivo del decimoquinto cumpleaños de una joven en muchas culturas. Este ritual especial se celebra sencillamente aquí en la Parroquia de _____, con la joven, acompañada de sus padres y padrinos, para recibir una bendición especial en la Iglesia. ¡Permítanos acompañar a usted y a su familia en este momento especial de la vida de su hija! Favor de comunicarse con nuestro Coordinador de Quinceañera, en _____ por lo menos tres meses antes de la celebración.