



During an Aug. 30 rehearsal for the quinceañera at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church, Father Dennis Shaw reacts to his giggling listeners as he explains the celebration's spiritual significance.



Veronica Mercado (right), one of Braulia's damas, congratulates her after the Aug. 31 service.

In Puerto Rico, Cuba, Mexico and other Latin American countries, a young woman's *quinceañera*, or 15th birthday, is a milestone marked by religious ceremonies and social festivities.

Historically, the *quinceañera* celebrated the fact that a Hispanic girl was no longer considered a child and was ready to be married. Now, it more commonly means she is ready to date or to have a boyfriend.

Braulia Reyes of Rochester recently completed this rite of passage into adulthood. A parishioner of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in Rochester, she celebrated her *quinceañera* on Aug. 31.

After much planning and preparation — shopping for a dress, choosing who would be her *damas* (maids of honor), and preparing for a service and reception — Braulia's big day had finally arrived. On the evening before her *quinceañera*, Braulia's family and friends gathered at Our Lady of Mount Carmel to rehearse the ceremony and to listen to Father Dennis Shaw, pastor at Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier, explain the spiritual significance of the celebration.

On the day of her *quinceañera*, Braulia's damas arrived at her home, which was already bustling with relatives who were there to help prepare her for the ceremony. Braulia wore a traditional white ball gown, giving her the appearance of a bride on her wedding day.

Soon after, Braulia arrived at Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and the service began with the procession of her court, which included her parents, an aunt and uncle, her *damas* and her escort, Darwin Aponte. Much of the service was conducted in Spanish, and it included Braulia's presentation of a bouquet of flowers to a statue of the Virgin Mary, her being crowned with a tiara, and being blessed by Father Shaw.

After the service, friends and relatives gathered at St. Martin's Place near the church for a party complete with dinner, music and dancing. Braulia and her friends danced and ate until it was time for her father to present her with high-heeled shoes. Braulia's father knelt on one knee, replacing his daughter's childlike shoes with a pair more suited to a young woman.



During the party to celebrate her quinceañera, Braulia's father, Braulio Reyes, places high-heeled shoes on her feet. This ritual symbolizes Braulia's passage into adulthood.



Quinceañera dolls line the table reserved for Braulia and her court of damas at the party after the service.

PHOTOS
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