ROOTS:
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who ruled the nation from 1876 to 1911, and the Catholic Church evangelized the secular celebrations and incorporated religion. Flores said, in the Catholic church, the quinceañera not only recognizes Latina girls' passage from childhood into young adulthood, it is also a ceremony in which she embraces Christian values and virtues and celebrates the beginning of her journey as a woman of Christ.

"Obviously, we kept the dress, we kept the party, we kept all that stuff," he said.

Flores said the Catholic Church in the United States initially looked upon quinceañeras with suspicion, however, because they were not tied to any sacrament, and it wasn't until the 1990s that Catholic quinceañera ceremonies were performed.

He said, during the Catholic ceremony, a special Mass is celebrated for the girl, during which she renews her Baptism vows and publicly rejects Satan. Later, she consecrates herself to the Lord, he said, and at the end, she brings flowers to the altar for Mary — the mother of Christ — and asks her to teach her to become a virtuous Christian woman.

"I think it's a gift, it's a blessing for them," he said.

While some non-Catholic churches in town incorporate the quinceañera traditions in their religious ceremonies and follow up with a big party, Catholics typically celebrate with a reception for family and friends after Mass.

Maria Sanchez, Our Lady of Angels secretary, said her daughter, Yessenia Garcia-Sanchez, celebrated her quinceañera in March, and her reception included many traditional aspects. Following the Mass, they had a party at Thompson Hall in Hermiston. As with many celebrations, the girl celebrating her quinceañera has a court with damas, or maids of honor, and chambelanes, escorts.

"Mostly traditional you would have 14 boys and 14 girls, each representing a year of the young girl's life," Sanchez said.

Sanchez said her daughter had seven boys and seven girls in her court, who attended the Mass, sat with her at the main table at the reception and performed a choreographed dance, which is common at quinceañeras. During the quinceañera, the girl dances with her father and then her sponsors, who helped make the party possible. Sanchez said, in many quinceañeras, the shoes a girl wears are significant. She said, in keeping with tradition, her daughter began the day wearing flats. During her reception, her father presented her with a pair of high heels, which symbolized her transition to a woman.

Genaro Loredo, pastor of Hispanic ministries at New Hope Church in Hermiston, said at the quinceañera ceremony, several items are dedicated to the girl, representing different Christian principles. The high heels, he said, symbolize following God's steps or direction in their life. Girls are sometimes also presented with a necklace or earrings, which pertains to the Book of Proverbs in the Bible and Solomon advising young women to wear those around their neck and in their ears in keeping with God's commandment.

"They are keeping them close to their heart, close to their ears, so they can always be reminders of God's instructions for their life and their heart as well as their ears being open to God's works in their life," Loredo said.

He said, depending on the family's desires, the girls are sometimes presented with a pillow for kneeling during prayer, which symbolizes humility

to the Lord.

At other churches or during other quinceañera receptions, girls are sometimes presented with a doll, a muñeca, representing their last toy. Sanchez said in Catholic celebrations, the muñeca is given to a young girl in the crowd, similar to a bride tossing her bouquet.

Hector Ramirez, pastor of Templo se Esperanza Y Amor Iglesia de Dios, said at ceremonies at his church, girls are sometimes presented with perfume, representing her submission to God in her prayer. They are also given a watch, which represents time dedicated to God, while also reminding her that God will

arrive again, and she has to be prepared. He said the girl may also receive a ring with a diamond or stone of her choice, representing the circle of God's life. Sometimes, if a girl prefers, she is presented with a cross to wear around her neck instead of a ring.

In addition to a fancy dress, which has its roots in European tradition, Flores said, and represents being a princess, tiaras are also common. Ramirez said, at his Christian church, the tiara also symbolizes the girl as a princess — daughter of God.

"Everybody does it a little bit different," Ramirez said.

PHOTO COURTESY MARIA SANCHEZ
Yessenia Garcia-Sanchez is flanked by her quinceañera court at her celebration Mass at Our Lady of Angels Catholic Church in March.