



CATHOLIC
SPANISH
TRANSLATIONS

A Catholic Minister's Checklist for Reviewing Machine (AI) Translations from English to Spanish

How to evaluate AI-generated Spanish before using it in ministry materials

Machine (AI) translation tools can be helpful for quick drafts, but Catholic ministry communication requires more than grammatically correct Spanish. When a text will be used in a parish, diocese, publication, training document, website, newsletter, or pastoral resource, it should be reviewed for theology, tone, culture, audience, and consistency before it is shared.

Use this checklist when reviewing machine (AI) generated translations for Catholic ministry. The goal is not simply to catch errors. The goal is to make sure your message is clear, faithful, pastorally sensitive, and natural for the Hispanic/Latino Catholic community you hope to serve.

Before approving an AI (machine) translation, ask: Does this sound like faithful Catholic ministry communication to the people we actually serve?

1. Confirm the context

Machine translation often fails when it receives only titles, headings, menu items, buttons, or short phrases without context. Review every short phrase carefully. Ask whether the Spanish communicates the intended meaning, not merely the most common dictionary meaning.

Context



Ask these questions:

- Do headings and menu items make sense in their ministry context?
- Could a word have more than one meaning?
- Is the word order natural in Spanish?
- Are titles, program names, and proper nouns handled consistently?

Example: You may have the word March at the top of a newsletter and the machine translated it as march the verb instead of the month of the year. A title may need to be reorganized in Spanish so it sounds natural rather than following English word order.

2. Check the formality and tone of addressing the audience

Spanish requires choices that English often avoids: formal or informal tone, singular or plural “you,” and consistent verb forms. AI tools may move between tú, usted, and ustedes without noticing which is confusing for the reader.

Tone



Ask these questions:

- Is the tone formal and respectful (usted) or more familiar and conversational (tú)?
- Does the tone fit your organization and the intended audience?
- Is the audience addressed as one person or as a group?
- Does the translation stay consistent from beginning to end?

3. Watch gendered nouns and adjectives

English often does not reveal the gender of a person’s role or description, but Spanish usually requires it. AI may guess incorrectly, especially with titles, ministries, staff roles, and biographical descriptions.

Gender



Ask these questions:

- Are titles such as director/directora, maestro/maestra, coordinador/coordinadora correct?
- Are adjectives matched correctly to the person or group?
- Does the translation accidentally change someone’s gender from one sentence to another?

4. Verify consistency across the whole document

Machine translation often translates sentence by sentence, which can create inconsistency in terms, titles, names, tone, and style. This is especially problematic in policies, magazines, websites, booklets, formation resources, and recurring publications. Ideally the terms should be consistent throughout all of your ministry materials.

Terminology



Ask these questions:

- Are key Catholic terms translated the same way throughout?
- Are ministry names, office names, and titles consistent?
- Does the text use the same level of formality throughout?
- Would the same wording be used across your organization’s future materials?

Example: The name of your ministry should always be the same on every resource. Decide whether it should stay in English or what it will translate to in Spanish.

5. Research official Church quotations

AI tools usually translate quotations instead of locating existing approved or official translations. For Catholic materials, this can be a serious problem. Scripture, papal documents, catechetical texts, canon law, liturgical texts, and magisterial documents already have official published translations in Spanish. This is also true of many philosophical and theological texts.

Quotations



Ask these questions:

- Are Scripture passages taken from the preferred and approved Spanish Bible translation?
- Are quotations from Church documents copied from official Spanish sources when available?
- Are document titles, citations and page numbers referenced accurate for the Spanish texts?
- Has terminology been checked against established Catholic usage?

Example: Even if a specific Bible verse is not used, but the author refers to the wedding feast of heaven, the Spanish should say “banquete de bodas” like Spanish bible texts instead of “fiesta” or “celebración” which are better for a party.

6. Review idioms, slang, and informal expressions

Literal translations of idioms, regional sayings, slang, or casual English expressions may confuse readers or sound unintentionally humorous. A good review decides whether to use an equivalent expression, explain the meaning plainly, or rewrite the sentence. Since idioms are different in each country, avoid them when addressing a diverse audience.

Idioms

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Ask these questions:

- Would this expression make sense to your specific Spanish-speaking Catholic audience?
- Is the phrase tied to a specific U.S. cultural reference that recent immigrants do not know?
- Should the wording be made more neutral for a diverse Hispanic audience?
- Is the tone appropriate for ministry communication?

7. Evaluate cultural fit

A translation should reflect the audience you actually serve. Recent immigrants, U.S.-born Hispanic Catholics, indigenous communities, mixed-nationality parishes, and highly educated professional audiences may need different choices in vocabulary, tone, register, and reading level.

Cultural fit

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Ask these questions:

- Who will read this: parents, catechists, clergy, youth, parish staff, or the general public?
- Are readers from one country, many countries, or multiple generations in the U.S.?
- Does the Spanish avoid country-specific slang?
- Does the text respect immigrant communities and their lived experience?

8. Make sure the Spanish sounds natural

A machine translation can be technically correct and still sound stiff, awkward, or foreign. Ministry materials should sound human, welcoming, clear, and pastorally warm.

Natural

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Ask these questions:

- Would a native speaker naturally write it this way?
- Does it sound like ministry communication rather than translated English?
- Is the sentence structure too long or too close to English?
- Could the wording be simplified for better readability?

Example: Catholics use certain words like “párroco” instead of “pastor”, or “alianza” instead of “pacto”. Although the other words are technically correct, they do not sound natural in ministry.

9. Adapt the reading level when needed

Some ministry audiences need plain, accessible language. If the English source is abstract, dense, or highly academic, the Spanish may need careful adaptation so the message remains faithful while becoming easier to understand.

Reading level

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Ask these questions:

- Is the vocabulary appropriate for the audience’s education level?
- Are sentences too long?
- Are theological concepts explained clearly for your specific audience?
- Is this text for a parish bulletin, parent handout, website, or training document?

10. Compare the translation against the original

Machine translation will carry over unclear wording, factual errors, awkward structure, and inconsistencies from the original. A careful human reviewer should review the original to notice problems affecting both languages.

Review


Ask these questions:

- Does the Spanish preserve the intended meaning?
- Did the AI omit, add, or soften anything important?
- Are there unclear sentences in the English that should be reworded?
- Does the final text communicate the message faithfully and effectively?

Example: If there is a typo or unclear wording in the English, AI may have guessed incorrectly what the word was supposed to be or what the meaning should be.

AI can translate words. Effective Catholic ministry communication requires human discernment, theological understanding, pastoral sensitivity, and cultural fluency.

When to ask for professional help

A quick internal review may be enough for a short announcement or low-risk draft. Professional Catholic localization is strongly recommended when the material will be public, printed, used across multiple ministries, sent to a large audience, connected to doctrine or policy, or intended to build trust with Hispanic/Latino Catholic communities.



Need help reviewing a Catholic Spanish translation?

Submit a Project Inquiry at CatholicSpanishTranslations.com

Catholic Communications Services we offer:		
<u>Review & Catholic Localization of Spanish texts</u> \$14/100 words Ideal for texts that already exist in Spanish — whether created by AI, staff, volunteers, or a previous translator — and need a professional Catholic review for accuracy, tone, terminology, readability, and cultural fit.	<u>Translation & Editorial Localization</u> \$19/100 words Ideal for books, manuals, catechetical resources, small group studies, pastoral plans, formation programs, policy documents, and professional ministry publications; rooted in thorough research, editorial precision, and cultural sensitivity.	<u>Transcreation, Consulting & Communications Strategy</u> \$75/hour Ideal for Catholic ministries, organizations, publishers, and dioceses that need help adapting materials or organizing, clarifying, or strengthening their bilingual Catholic communication strategy to deepen their engagement with Hispanic/Latino Catholics.