

Aust bishops retreat from Rome delegation

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Australia's Catholic bishops have retreated from an archbishop's push to go to Rome seeking answers on whether the seal of confession can be broken to protect children from sexual abuse.

Adelaide Archbishop Philip Wilson had proposed sending a delegation of Australian bishops to Rome to seek the Pope's guidance on the confessional seal and other issues raised in the child abuse royal commission.

But the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference's week-long plenary meeting in Sydney has ended without that commitment.

The nation's bishops discussed issues raised by the royal commission such as whether the seal of confession effectively protects everything said in the confessional, including if a child reveals they are being abused.

"The discussion was pastoral rather than tactical," the ACBC said in a statement to AAP on Thursday.

"The bishops were not simply responding to the royal commission but pursuing a broader pastoral discussion about how to help and support our priests and our people to reassure them about the practical application of the Sacrament of Penance at times when the seal of the confessional comes up."

The ACBC said no clear commitment or decision was made about a delegation to Rome in the royal commission's final hearing into the Catholic Church in February.

"We were dealing with the reality that we face in the most pastoral way possible."

Royal commissioner Andrew Murray had challenged the five metropolitan archbishops on whether they had the courage to take the confession issue and others around child sexual abuse to the Vatican and push for changes to canon law and general instructions to bishops and priests.

With Australian bishops not due to make a formal "ad limina" visit to Rome for another two years, Archbishop Wilson said they did not need to wait and should immediately prepare material to send to the Holy See asking for guidance.

"There's no reason why we, the bishops of Australia, can't get together and prepare material about this with these questions that have been raised and actually send a delegation of bishops to Rome to see the Pope," he told the commission.