

My Eyes were Opened!

My diary said that I would be in Aylesford Sports College most of the morning today - after all, I'd offered to help at a Prayer/Reflection room set up in a quieter part of the school (apart from when the musicians beneath us let rip!)

It was all the brainchild of **CAST**, a local organisation, which goes into secondary schools in and around Maidstone, trying to make the Christian message relevant to teenagers. The room was set up with curtains, lights, quiet music and 7 interactive prayer/reflection "stations". One asked us to write on red hearts things we were sorry for, then to tear the heart in half and throw it in the bin. Another station asked us to let go of resentments and grudges as we placed a lozenge in water and watched it dissolve. A third asked us to make our idea of God out of pipe cleaners, and then put it up on a board. All a bit whacky, do I hear you say? I thought so too, until I started looking at what the students had written? A map of the world was covered with prayers/hopes for different trouble spots in the world. This is the week that the Malaysian airliner was declared lost in the sea west of Australia, and the students' prayers echoed the news as it developed: Monday had prayers for the plane to be found, but today the prayers/hopes were for the families. And all those prayers were pinned on the map in one of the remotest parts of the world where nothing happens! I found that powerful.

I moved on to the next station, which asked us to write a question we would like to ask God, and then to peg it on a washing line. I was riveted by the questions:

Why did you create the world?

Why do lives get taken away when they are loved?

Why am I here? Can you tell me?

Why don't you show people you are real?

Dear God, how is my family doing in heaven?

Can you stop people hurting?

Why do friendships have to end?

Why have I suffered so badly in my life?

Why does cancer exist?

Can you take me back to the past?

Why won't you help me?

I spent most of the three hours I was there in tears. I watched students bounce in sceptical and blase, and saw them begin to engage. I saw many tears and students comforting each other, staff in tears, and staff comforting students. Lots of deep stuff was going on, and I admired the students for having the courage to expose their feelings and to be so honest. Perhaps we adults have become too satisfied with pat answers or have given up asking deep questions.

My eyes were opened to the depth of feeling and pain exposed through what the students had written, and by their directness and honesty. And it made me realise again how wrong we are if we think that teenagers have few cares in the world or do not think deeply.

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