

The First Baptist Church's Ladies' Prayer Group Meeting, September 23rd, 1998

Upheaval and snacks are the only things certain any more.

A riff on "The Regency Committee on Decorum and Punchbowl Poop Prevention"
by Tasha Robinson

A young, unmarried woman in your community, Carla Brambles, went missing a few weeks ago. This past Sunday, at church, she reappeared, naked, in a brilliant flash of light in front of the pulpit. You are members of a ladies' prayer group at the First Baptist Church in town. You have some opinions about The Incident. Your goal is to convince everyone that your opinions are the right ones, because they definitely are.

A Committee LARP for 4+ players about religion, small politics, and, of course, the inevitability of human connection and upheaval.

This game is intended to be played as an in-person LARP (with a snack table—one person should sign up for that, as is the custom within prayer groups). See the **Appendix** for a scenario that can be played via Discord or group chat.

A Designer's Note:

Before you dig into this, I would like you to understand that this is based on my religious upbringing. I grew up in a church connected with the Southern Baptist Convention in Mississippi. It was very Southern, very Baptist, and at times, very scary in its own way. I will always carry that with me and I hope this game will allow you to empathize with the tension that being in a community like that, one that is so rooted in questions of death, eternal life, faith, and family, brings with it.

If you grew up in a similar situation, I ask that you take extra care when engaging with this work. It can be emotionally hard to engage with possible trauma, even indirectly. If you did not grow up in a similar situation, I ask you to take these characters and their faith seriously. *They are not deluded or tricked or misled.* They are women who have faith and conviction for many, complicated reasons and that should be respected in this space. While this game engages with humor, absurdity, and satire, it should also engage seriously with its own religious tension.

Lastly, an aside about the culture I am setting this in: Church Ladies are notoriously political. At times biting, intense, and passive aggressive. These women do not actively engage in cruelty, but their circumstances often breed a certain type of restraint, and if pushed to the edge, they are capable of cruelty, and in this LARP it is somewhat expected you will push your characters to, at the very least, a very tense space. Please take care of yourself and the other players in this LARP.

Safety Tools

Sanctuary: Play can stop at any time using the word "Sanctuary," and should be honored by all players as a break. No obligation to state why.

Open Door Policy: You can leave at any time. Just get up and go! It's probably in character, anyway.

Character Creation

To create your character, think of a church lady. She could be anywhere from 30–80 years of age. She will need to have a strong belief in the church. Her belief in God is not the most important thing—these are all women who have more conviction in the ritual and space than they do in their own faith. What matters is they feel they cannot leave this community, or tolerate disruption within it. The Incident has left them shaken. To what degree, you decide.

Name:

Age:

Occupation:

Marital Status:

Number of Children:

1. What is her stance on The Incident?

Choose one:

- a. It was an act of God.
- b. It was an act of the Devil.
- c. It was fake.

2. What is her relationship to her own faith?

Choose one:

- a. She believes strongly.
- b. She is somewhat shaken.
- d. She is on the verge of crisis.

3. Does she have outside stresses?

Some possible options:

- a. Her marriage.
- b. Her children.
- c. Her job.
- d. Her duties to the church.
- e. Her friends.

4. What secret does she know about one of the other women that could ruin them?

Some possible options:

- a. An affair.
- b. A vice.
- c. A confession of doubt.
- d. A confession of transgression.

5. Who did she speak to about The Incident?

Some possible options:

- a. Her husband.
- b. One of her children.
- c. The Pastor.
- d. The Organist.
- e. A close friend.
- f. A stranger.

6. Did the conversation form or affect her stance?

Some possible options:

- a. It formed her stance, and yet—she gained Nothing.
- b. It affected her stance positively, she gained Courage.
- c. It affected her stance negatively, she gained Doubt.

7. What prayer request has she brought to the group?

Some examples:

- a. Mrs. Martha, who is having surgery this next Tuesday to replace a hip.
- b. Joanie Dunkirk, who's kid is having trouble at school (we don't talk about the trouble).
- c. Carl Hansen, who asked that we pray for him and his brother as they work out who will get sole possession of their construction business.

A Note About the Organizer

While not a GM, per se, it is the Organizer's job to generally introduce the game, help with pacing and move things along. The Organizer has an agenda. You want this group to break apart at the seams (*why* is up to you). You must vie for large emotion and keep the engine churning. One player will be elected the Organizer before starting.

To Start

Introduce your characters. You do not have to share your Stance on The Incident right away, as it will come out during play. Discuss possible connections between the characters outside of the prayer group. Decide how long each of them has been coming to this church, and particularly, this group. Engage in light in character chit-chat, and when it feels appropriate, start the game. The meeting should follow a simple but somewhat unyielding structure:

1. The Organizer asks all of the ladies how they are doing and outlines who brought the snacks and what snacks were brought. There is an unspoken rule that if you have not gotten your snacks before the meeting is called to order, you will not get snacks until the meeting is over. This unspoken rule can be broken during play for any reason, preferably a dramatic one.

2. The Organizer will call for Prayer Requests. The ladies will go around and say their prayer requests in the group, either in order around the group or popcorn style. When finished, one player (decided in the moment by them) will bring up that they think you should add Carla Brambles, the woman who had been missing, but is now back, to the list. There can, and might, be more than one player who begins to bring it up. This is a great moment to have one or both or all of them attempt to (politely, passive aggressively) brow beat the other into having to be the one to bring it up.

3. Once this is brought up, the discussion is open and free-form. If on a set amount of time, this is when to start the clock. Each player should mount their argument regarding their Stance on The Incident. Take turns

based on how outspoken you think your character would be. Start polite. Get nasty. This is a game about upheaval. Do it justice. Be passive aggressive. Spill secrets. Yell. Cry. Apologize. Question. Threaten to tell the pastor about this. Threaten to tell everyone's husbands about this. Use what little power your characters have to make everyone else feel powerless. And then watch as they do the same.

Your character should, by game's end, be distraught, doubt-filled, and wanting nothing more than to forget this whole thing ever happened. You will not tell anyone about this discussion. About this day. About how you acted. You will die with this inside of you.

Continue discussion until it reaches a boiling point. A consensus should not be reached. It cannot be reached. It is crucial to each of you that the others agree with you.

Escalate. **Escalate. Escalate.** This is a matter of death, eternal life, faith, and family. By the end of it, Carla Brambles shouldn't even matter. This is about everything you've ever felt and never said. This is about *you*. (Your character, that is, don't make this personal.)

Ending the Game

The game ends when one of you overturns the snack table.

Acknowledgments:

A huge thank you to my mother for her invaluable input on how prayer groups in a First Baptist Church work & to all the folks at BigBadCon 2023 who inspired me to get into game design.

Additional Inspirations:

“Sealed for Freshness” by Doug Stone, as performed by Lindsey White
“The Straights Are Not Okay” by Ash Kreider

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Appendix A:

The First Baptist Church’s Youth Group Group Chat, September 23rd, 2018

A riff on the above scenario, optimized for Discord or group chat. This can be adapted for in-person play as well. Use the “Ending the Game” from the first scenario if doing so. The Youth Intern will supply the snacks.

*A young, unmarried woman in your community, Carla Brambles, went missing a few weeks ago. This past Sunday, at church, she reappeared, naked, in a brilliant flash of light in front of the pulpit. You are members of a youth group at the First Baptist Church in town. You have some opinions about The Incident. Your opinions **will not** decide if Carla’s social fate, but **will** decide if her little sister, Tammy, is mercilessly bullied or heralded as The Chosen One.*

A Committee LARP for 4+ players about religion, small politics, and, of course, the inevitability of human connection and upheaval. And also teenage angst, doubt, and love.

A Designer’s Note:

Growing up in the church is weird. Difficult. Strange. Or it’s great! Some folks really take to it. I did. But looking back on it and processing it, it was weird, difficult, and strange, even for someone who was *really* into it at the time.

How your characters deal with that weirdness is up to you. There’s a lot of guilt, shame, etc., that is built into being a teen in this scene. I ask that, as with the Church Ladies, you engage with the emotions, faith, and struggles of these teens with a certain amount of respect. These things are and feel **big** for the characters.

Safety tools from the first scenario are in play here.

A Note About the Youth Intern:

While not a GM, per se, the Youth Intern is the oldest, a college student who is in charge of this rag tag group of teens. They lead Youth Group activities often times and monitor this Discord. They would like the kids to **Please stop talking about The Incident**. They also want the kids to stop trying to make out with each other during movie night. They won’t succeed. One of you will need to be the Youth Intern. Answer the questions below but as a college student.

Character Creation

To create your character, think of a church teen. They can be between 14–18 years old. They might come to this Youth Group because they're Church Rats, aka kids of parents who are involved heavily in the church, or maybe their boyfriend or girlfriend goes to church there. Or maybe they're really into Jesus on their own. It can be anything. The Incident has left them shaken. To what degree, you decide.

Name:

Age:

Favorite Hobby:

Dating Status:

Number of Siblings:

1. What is their stance on The Incident?

Choose one:

- a. It was an act of God.
- b. It was an act of the Devil.
- c. It was fake.

2. What is their relationship to their own faith?

Choose one:

- a. They believe strongly.
- b. They are somewhat shaken.
- d. They are on the verge of crisis.

3. Do they have outside stresses?

Some possible options:

- a. School.
- b. Parents.
- c. A job.
- d. Their friends.
- e. Unrequited love.

4. What secret do they know about one of the other teens that could ruin them?

Some possible options:

- a. Having premarital sex.
- b. A vice.
- c. A confession of doubt.
- d. A confession of transgression.

5. Who did they speak to about The Incident?

Some possible options:

- a. Their parents.
- b. Their siblings.
- c. The Pastor.
- d. The Youth Intern.
- e. A close friend.
- f. A stranger.

6. Did the conversation form or affect her stance?

Some possible options:

- a. It formed their stance, and yet—they gained Nothing.
- b. It affected their stance positively, they gained Courage.
- c. It affected their stance negatively, they gained Doubt.

7. How do they feel about the Youth Intern?

Some examples:

- a. They like them.
- b. They do not like them.
- c. They are in love with them.
- d. They want them gone.

To Start

Introduce your characters in a separate channel or pre-chat. You do not have to share your Stance on The Incident right away, as it will come out during play. Discuss possible connections between the characters outside of the youth group. Decide how long each of them has been coming to this church, and particularly, this group.

Engage in light in-character chit-chat, and when it feels appropriate, start the game, AKA start the movie. Host a movie night (recommended movie: Big Fish) over Discord, suggested by the Youth Intern to keep you from making out during in-person movie night. Have this chat happen during the movie.

1. The Youth Intern will send out A STATEMENT REGARDING THE INCIDENT, APPROVED BY GREG, THE YOUTH PASTOR before the movie starts. The statement does not invite response in its wording. It is supposed to be the final say.

2. Your character has a strong belief in their Stance. They are attempting to convince everyone else of that Stance. They care deeply about the small power they can gain from being **Right**. This part of the discussion should be free form. When it lulls, the Youth Intern should attempt to steer your characters towards discussion of past and upcoming events. Your characters will continuously keep coming back to The Incident.

3. As you continue to discuss The Incident and the Youth Intern continues to attempt to divert, begin to escalate. Start petty. Make a snide remark about someone's behavior. Doubt someone's conviction. Make them uncomfortable. Let on that you know something about their character that no one else does. Open separate channels for mini discussions. Rejoin the group when you've reached a boiling point. (Allow other players to read these channels, for funsies.)

Continue to talk about Tammy Brambles and her status. She is never included in this discussion. The Youth Intern should note this with increasing distress and hesitation. Devolve. Become teenage angst. Become doubt. Leave everything behind and forget why you're there. Threaten to ake out with someone at your next in person movie night. Make the Youth Intern use ALL CAPS. Make the Youth Intern apologize for using ALL CAPS.

Threaten.

Escalate.

Argue.

Bare your teeth.

Remember what it means to be an animal.

Learn the meaning of the word visceral.

Add primal to your lexicon.

Create a story that will remind you of Lord of the Flies when you read it in English class next year.

Put on your war paint and dance around the fire as you burn every bridge you've ever made.

Ending the Game

Play ends when the movie is over or one of you jumps into a voice chat and delivers what can only later be described as "an unhinged monologue of intense, unwavering passion."