

Sisters and neighbors

By [David Heim](#)

May 30, 2014

Representations of Christian life that are sympathetic, plausible, and interesting are rare enough in popular media to deserve notice. That's one reason to be a fan of the British series [Call the Midwife, now in its third season](#) on public television.

Based on the memoirs of [Jennifer Worth](#), the show is about a group of midwives who serve the East End of London in the 1950s and operate out of an Anglican convent. These midwives never expected to be working for nuns, but they end up loving these women with whom they share meals and a profession, if not a faith.

The show adheres to many details of Worth's memoirs, but more importantly it is faithful to their tone. Worth was not a believer, but she admired the nuns and was grateful to learn about midwifery and encounter the East End in their company.

"They were holy people," she wrote. "You have to be in contact with pure goodness before you can see what true religion is." The nuns in the show are odd, earthy, and exasperating, but the genuineness of their calling is never in question.

The show consists mostly of straightforward dramas about birthing mothers and their impoverished circumstances. In between births, the midwives return to the convent, where the sisters offer blunt advice about the common work and the affairs of the neighborhood. Each episode contains at least one glimpse—usually at a crisis point in the story—of the nuns singing a psalm or other parts of the liturgy.

In a deft, understated way, using barely any Christian language, *Call the Midwife* pulls the 21st-century viewer into an essentially Christian world. It is a world in which the moral heart of the neighborhood is a dedicated Christian community and the heart of that community is service, rooted in a life of prayer.