

The real 'acts of God'

NORTHAMPTON — When Margaret Walters left her job in Enfield, Conn., on June 1 and began driving to her home in Springfield, the tornado that was soon to touch down was already wreaking havoc. Margaret tried several short-cuts to get from her workplace to her home, but each street was blocked off and she had to try alternate routes.

The winds were fierce, visibility was nearly zero and Margaret was alone in her car. Frightened and desperate to return home to safety and her husband, Herman, Margaret finally tried a more central route she often took when returning from work. The tornado touched down

at a different angle, a new prediction. I happened on a newscaster who referred to the tornado barreling through Springfield as "an act of God." I shook my head and went on to the next station.

It was after the tornado, when my sister-in-law Marcelle told me the story of her mother Margaret and of Debbie and Elizabeth's heroism that I thought

this: The tornado was most definitely not an act of God, but Debbie and Elizabeth's mid-storm search and rescue very much was.

God did not trigger the tornado that struck Springfield last week — horrible natural disasters are not "acts of God." True acts of God are the actions of those people who venture out in the storm to offer help or provide shelter to someone in their home. The volunteer work of all those who follow the disaster, bringing food, blankets, money and support — those are true acts of God.

The tornado was an act of nature — one that can best be explained by cold air masses colliding with warm air masses. The physics of tornadoes can be dismantled and debated. But this does not alter the fact that tornadoes are natural, not divine phenomena.

I was glued last week to the television during the tornado and was channel-surfing furiously ... I happened on a newscaster who referred to the tornado as "an act of God." I shook my head and went on to the next station.



AP PHOTO
People examine storm damage June 2, a day after a tornado hit Springfield and nearby towns.



Andrea Ayvazian

while Margaret was inching her way home and she found that she was too afraid to continue.

She pulled over and said some prayers.

Meanwhile, in Springfield, sisters Debbie and Elizabeth Weitkumat, close friends of Margaret's, were becoming extremely anxious because they could not reach Margaret at home or on her cell phone. Worried that Margaret was alone, scared and trying to make her way home, Debbie and Elizabeth set out in the midst of the storm in their own car to trace the route Margaret often drove when returning from work.

At this point the storm was raging, but Debbie and Elizabeth would not be deterred. They felt sure Margaret needed them, and equally sure they could find her. And that they did. Debbie and Elizabeth drove at a snail's pace along Margaret's usual route and found her in her car by the side of the road.

They then brought her to their home and called Margaret's husband to report that she was safe.

I was glued to the television during the tornado and was channel-surfing furiously trying to find any weatherman with more news,

What I find truly sad and frightening is that some "acts of nature" like the droughts, hurricanes and floods sweeping across our fragile planet in recent years — often referred to as "acts of God" — are actually caused, or at least intensified by, acts of humans.

Because human "progress" has set in motion profound climate change, the cataclysmic acts of nature that once occurred periodically around the globe are happening with increasing intensity and frequency.

Dramatic droughts, hurricanes and floods, once blamed on God, can be tied with ever-increasing assurance to human-induced global climate change. Those "acts of God" are really "acts of humans," and they will increase in number and intensity until we dedicate ourselves to reversing global warming.

When terrifying climatic events happen, newscasters and weathermen need to avoid using the term "acts of God" unless they are referring to people like Debbie and Elizabeth and their courageous outing to find and rescue their dear friend Margaret.

The Rev. Andrea Ayvazian, pastor of the Haydenville Congregational Church, writes a monthly column on faith, culture and politics. She can be reached at opinion@gazettenet.com.