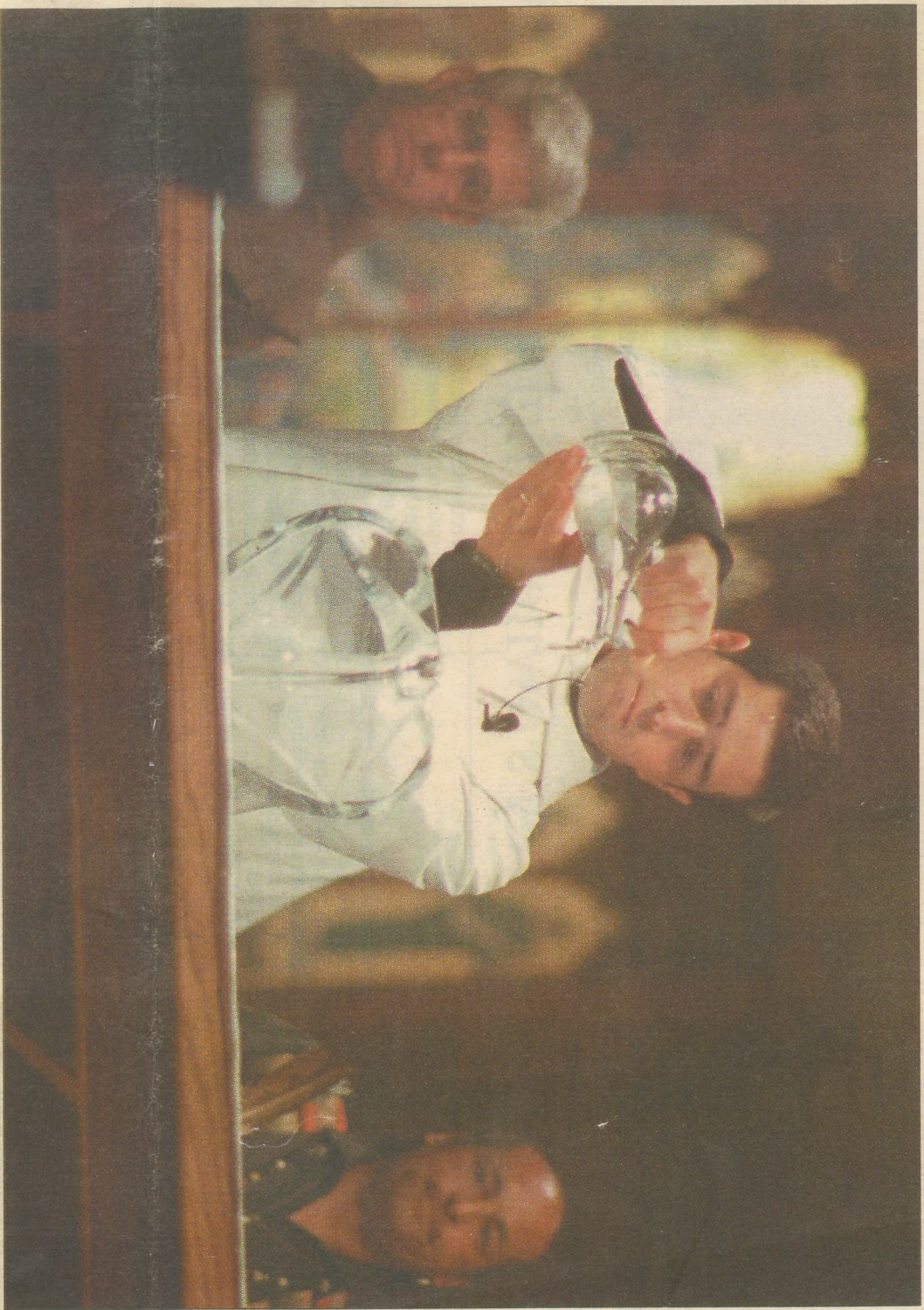


CLEANSING THE SEA



JEFF MAY/NEWSPRESS PHOTOS

The Rev. Chris Rankin-Williams of All Saints By-the-Sea Episcopal Church pours sea water into a glass vessel during the ceremony. Below, a procession is led with burning incense.

Service seeks spiritual help to heal ocean

By ANTONIO A. PRADO
NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER

South Coast environmentalists, and representatives of diverse religions and spiritual traditions gathered Sunday and called for a higher-than-earthly power to help heal the polluted ocean.

While science is being used to find the cause of ocean water pollution, the audience of about 300 at All Saints By-the-Sea Episcopal Church in Montecito turned to their religious beliefs to find inspiration for their cause.

Organized by the environmentalist group Heal the Ocean, the sea-healing service united celebrants from various faiths.

It also brought together worship rituals seldom seen together, such as the Greek Orthodox tradition of burning incense and sprinkling the congregation with holy water, the chanting of Tibetan Buddhist prayers and the recitation of a Jewish call to worship, said in Hebrew by Heal the Ocean co-founder Jeff Young.

"We've come from different cultures, and different faiths and religions, but we have a common concern," said Rev. Constantine A. Zozos, pastor of St. Barbara Greek Orthodox Church.

Accompanied by blasts of the church's powerful organ, the service began with a procession of clergy and representatives of various faiths, each carrying a vase or cup of water from the Santa Barbara Channel.

They offered prayers from their respective faiths as each poured the water into a large crystal bowl on the church's altar, which was blessed by the spiritual leaders in accordance with their unique traditions. The water was returned to the sea after the service.

Each of the celebrants alluded to the ocean as the origin of life on Earth, and to humanity's role as its steward.

"Ocean, I thank you for your gift of life," said Wonono Rubio, representing the Coastal Band of the Chumash Nation. "Please accept this healing water, your water, and its healing spirit."

"Heal those who would pollute and destroy that which you have given us," added Kaliya Damona Das, representing the Vaisnava Tradition of East India. His contribution included water he gathered during a recent visit to the Indian Ocean.

To illustrate his point, Shamanic practitioner David Perry brought his sea water in a plastic Evian water bottle he found littered on a local beach.

