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**FILIPINO YOUTH SAY NO TO THE MEGACHURCH CONSTRUCTION!
Defend our communities! Fight against gentrification!**

NEW YORK, NY—Filipino youth of Anakbayan New York stand firmly with the community of Woodside in the fight against the construction and expansion of a megachurch. The Universal Church aims to build a 70-foot high building that would eventually lead to the displacement of the local community.

The Universal Church, located on 69th Street and Roosevelt Avenue, is asking for an exception from New York City to break a building code that limits the height of building construction. The size, scale and scope of the building will be like none other, rising 30-feet above surrounding buildings. The proposed building would affect the quality of life of those who live nearby, potentially creating health and environmental issues from air and noise pollution. The proposed exception would lead to a commercialization of the area and drive up the cost of living and doing business for the masses of immigrant families, workers, and small business owners in the surrounding area. The Universal Church—based originally in Brazil—is not without controversy in its home country. It has been alleged to [embezzle millions upon millions of dollars worth of money from Brazil's impoverished communities](#) and may very well be conducting business in the same way in their overseas chapters. While the supposedly numerous programs the church offers to Woodside residents *sound* good and although its many churchgoers may be very respectable people—many from working-class immigrant families themselves--the main contention with the church administration has always been that, time and time again, it has failed to demonstrate the actual *need* for the expansion of their building. The church has failed to demonstrate a willingness to involve the community in its own development.

As Anakbayan NY members engaged with Woodside residents, specifically those living right behind the megachurch on the expansion project, it was clear that many residents were not even aware of the development proposal. This lack of transparency shows that there clearly was no regard for the residents of Woodside.

Anakbayan New York recognizes that this fight against the construction of a megachurch is not just about its lack of necessity, but about the deeper issue of displacement. We have seen this method of displacement in many parts of New York City: in Harlem, the Lower East Side, Brooklyn, and more recently in Queens. Mayors, past and present, along with local city councils provide tax breaks to businesses, corporations, and in this instance, to religious institutions and private developers who establish their base in impoverished parts of NYC, home to working-class, black and brown, immigrant communities. Through the superficial reasons of “rezoning” and “development,” many businesses and other institutions will use every means possible to quietly thwart existing codes and regulations in order to ultimately line their pockets without community consent.

Local NYC landlords, in turn, raise the rent and evict longtime working-class residents through use of harassment and other shady methods in order to attract residents with bigger pocketbooks. The Universal Church’s construction of the megachurch would increase its own property value. The inevitable effects of this rising property value would lead to the rise in the property value of surrounding houses and apartment buildings. This would mean that the tenants of these houses and apartments buildings would have to pay a higher mortgage or rent, respectively. This rise in property value goes hand in hand with the Business Improvement District (BID) that essentially opens up and deepens the process of gentrification and thus the displacement of working-class, immigrant neighborhoods. Local tenants and small businesses of this neighborhood and workers may find themselves unable to afford their places and will have to move out.

Legislation will be created as a means to stifle poor, local businesses and serves as a disguise for regulation. These development plans will have a negative impact on local Filipino-owned businesses. The displacement of the traditional Filipino working-class immigrant community will mean the loss of regular patrons. Traffic conditions will worsen due to the inevitable closure of main roads during the demolition and construction of the proposed megachurch. This means Little Manila will be less accessible to Filipinos coming from other boroughs and states such as New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania and others via the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. The completion of the megachurch will mean a permanent increase in automobile traffic, and less available legal street parking especially to the residents of Woodside.

This phenomenon is better known as gentrification. This is bureaucrat capitalism at play, where the very wealthy contribute and perpetuate the war in dispossessing the poor, working-class immigrants of their land, community, and culture in order to increase profits. The building and expansion of the megachurch will further contribute to rapid gentrification happening around Queens, and along that, increased police presence in an area with undocumented working-class people.

This is also true to the displacement tactics used in many countries in the global south affected by imperialism, most notably the Philippines, whereas the current state of the Philippine economy, with unequal neoliberal policies at the forefront, forces thousands of migrants to leave the Philippines daily. Local landlords work hand-in-hand with crony bureaucrats and, through the often times violent enforcement from the military, continue their oppression and exploitation of the Filipino people.

Anakbayan calls on the Filipino youth and the people of Woodside of all oppressed nationalities to stand united in defending and protecting their communities. We call for democratic community control over development to ensure that development is genuinely for the people. The lack of transparency of this project, especially to the residents directly neighboring the megachurch, reveals the underhanded tactics used to keep our community in the dark.

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