

Country Profile: Micronesia

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Country Overview

The term *Micronesia* is short for the *Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)*, and refers more accurately to geographic/cultural region (not dissimilar to terms such as *Central America* or the *Caribbean*).

Micronesia contains four main countries (and a few little ones but we'll focus on the main four):

- Republic of the Marshall Islands;
- Federated States of Micronesia;
- Republic of Palau; and
- Republic of Kiribati.

Micronesia also has 6 main cultural groups: the Marshallese, the Kosraeans, the Pohnpeians, the Chuukese, the Yapese and the Paulauans. In some placements JVs have the opportunity to interact with some of these culture groups from outside of their host island, as for example at Xavier High School (in Chuuk), where there are students from each of these cultural groups.

The FSM consists of some 600 islands grouped into four states: Kosrae, Pohnpei, Chuuk (Truk) and Yap. Occupying a very small total land mass, it is scattered over an ocean expanse five times the size of France. With a population of 110,000, each cultural group has its own language, with English as the common language.

Chuuk, part of FSM, is actually comprised of dozens of islands. Technically, the island that the JVs live and work on is Weno (pronounced *weda*) but when we say things like "on Chuuk" we really mean on that island. Chuuk is more economically impoverished than Pohnpei, which tends to be more affluent and explicitly "Western" in some ways. Overall, "poverty" in Micronesia is different from the poverty that most JVs have in mind when they enter JVC, i.e. it is a poverty manifest from the remoteness of the islands, lack of access to resources (education, professional work force, etc.), and other factors.

Exports from the FSM include fish, bananas, and copra. Spanish explorers encountered the islands in the 1500s, and missionary activities and coconut trade began in the mid-19th century. Over the subsequent centuries, Spain, Germany, Japan and the U.S. all sought for (and often gained) colonial or administrative control of the islands. The islands were a major battleground during World War II.

Though formally independent as of 1979, in 1986 Micronesia signed a "Compact of Free Association" with the U.S. Washington took responsibility for defense and gained the right to set up military bases and deny other nations access to Micronesia. In return, Micronesia received financial assistance averaging \$100m per year, and the right of Micronesians to live and work in the US. Micronesia also

takes its cue from Washington on foreign policy.

A renegotiated 20-year compact, worth \$3.5 billion to Micronesia and the Marshall Islands, was signed by U.S. President George W. Bush in December 2003. Some of the money is being diverted into trust funds, intended to provide a financial resource for Micronesia after the compact expires.

Despite its small population and the large amount of incoming aid from the U.S., Japan and elsewhere, Micronesia has relatively high unemployment, a matter compounded by increasing numbers of Filipino migrant workers. The gap between rich and poor is increasing as business and officials benefit disproportionately from U.S. aid donations.

History in Country with JVC

Past: The Jesuits have had a huge presence in the Micronesia (the islands have been half Catholic and half Protestant since after WWII), and have established some of the best schools in the region (e.g. Xavier High School).

Jesuit Volunteers have been serving in Micronesia since the 1980s, primarily in response to an invitation from missioning U.S. Jesuits from the New York Province. As one of JVC's first international sites, JVC has had JV communities in Majero and Ebeye in the Marshall Islands, Palau, Guam, Pohnpei, and Chuuk. Throughout the years there have been shifts in JVC sites (countries, islands, and worksites) for various reasons. For example, most recently, due to the U.S. Jesuits leaving Majero, JVC closed the JV community in the Marshall Islands in 2009.

Given JVC's long history in Micronesia, some Jesuits, former JVs (FJVs), and other Support Persons and local JVC partners from historical years (pre-2009) may refer to JVC as "JIV" (Jesuit International Volunteers) or "JVI" (Jesuit Volunteers International).

Present Communities & Worksites: In fall 2015, JVC plans to have **11 JVs** in Micronesia, who live in **3 JV communities** in Chuuk (2) and Pohnpei (1), and serve at **5 worksites**.

Chuuk

- **Mau Piailug House (6 JVs)** – Sites: Xavier High School (4 JVs); Akoyikoyi School (2 JVs)

Xavier High School is a Jesuit high school that receives students from islands across the region. It is considered the best college preparatory school in Micronesia. As a boarding school it is one of JVC's more unique placements - JVs live on Xavier's campus (and by January plan to move into a newly constructed house on Xavier's campus, which will be shared with other independent volunteer staff). They also share the campus with approximately 75 male students and a diverse group of faculty and staff (including U.S. Jesuits, lay and religious from Micronesia, Japan, Australia, Philippines, etc.). Female students also attend XHS though live with host families on the island and are bused to and from the school daily. JVs' meals are cooked by the school and they share meal times with the other faculty and staff. XHS's education system is essentially very similar to the education system in the U.S. (i.e. calendar year, grade levels, etc.), and throughout the years, JVs have taught every level and subject.

Website: xaviermicronesia.org

Akoyikoyi School was a new site for JVC in 2012-13. Founder/director Clark Graham was a Peace Corps

volunteer in the '70s who married a Chuukese woman and has been living in Chuuk for over 30 years. He is passionate about improving the Chuukese education system and started the school in 2012 with one primary level and employs a charter school model. The curriculum's focus includes cultural literacy. The school is hoping to grow to serve grades K-8. The word Akoyikoyi refers to a sound a bird makes to signal the dawn, and figuratively connotes knowledge or enlightenment. Website: ship-hoops.org/akoyikoyi-school

➤ **Light of Chuuk House (2 JVs)** – Site: Saramen Chuuk Academy (2 JVs)

Saramen Chuuk Academy (aka Saram) is a diocesan Catholic high school and most of the faculty and staff are Chuukese. SCA is a typical “day” school and is located in the center of town in Weno. It is common for JVs to teach any subject or any grade level where there is a need, as well as coach and moderate after-school sports and clubs.

The JVs are housed by the school, living on campus in sex-separated apartments (one on the 2nd floor and one on the 3rd floor of the school's main building). The JVs generally live independently, i.e. shopping and cooking their own food, and are responsible for banking, cleaning, laundry, etc.

Pohnpei

➤ **Paulino Cantero House (3 JVs)** – Sites: Pohnpei Catholic School (1 JV); Our Lady of Mercy Catholic High School (2 JVs)

Our Lady of Mercy Catholic High School was previously a vocational school and in recent years has shifted to a regular secondary school. The Mercedarian Sisters of Berriz (MMB), regionally based in Guam, run the school and live in a house next door. The JVs live in an apartment attached to OLMCHS.

Pohnpei Catholic School is a primary school for grades 1-8. JVs in recent years have taught 1st grade and 7-8th grade subjects. Most faculty and staff in both schools are Pohnpeian, and both schools are located on the Catholic mission grounds in Kolonia town. Website: pohnpeicatholicschool.org

Support Persons and Resources:

JV communities in Chuuk and in Pohnpei each have their own Jesuit In-Country Coordinator (ICC) who serves as a liaison between the International Program office of JVC and the site supervisors and offers *cura personalis* (individual care and concern) for the JVs.

Chuuk's ICC, Fr. Tom Benz, arrived in Micronesia in August 2014. He lives with other Jesuits on the Xavier High School campus and serves as Superior for the Micronesian region. Just a few of the many works Fr Tom has taken on include former faculty *and* chaplain at St Peter's Preparatory School, Assistant Director of novices, and appointed Procurator. He is truly gifted in spiritual accompaniment and pastoral work.

At Xavier High School, staff members such Mr. and Mrs. Carl (the principal and school nurse respectfully) have been important resources for the JVs. Jesuits in formation have also provided support to the volunteers, in addition to other faculty and staff at the school.

At Saram, Kiki, a Saram staff member and frequent host mom takes the JVs under her wing at the school and outside of the school. She is a fantastic cultural liaison for JVs. She is the school's peace maker and matriarch.

Pohnpei's ICC, Fr. Dave Andrus, knows Micronesia very well. Years ago he served as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Marshall Islands and returned to Micronesia as a Jesuit. He is a great resource for perspective on Pohnpeian culture and is attentive to the needs of the JVs. He currently serves as the chairperson for the board of Our Lady of Mercy Catholic High School.

OLM Principal Sr Isabel is a smart, professional, and holistic supervisor for the JVs. Vice Principal Russell has been on staff for over 10 years and serves as a mentor for the JVs who teach there as well. Other priests who live at the Jesuit Residence as well as Sisters who teach in both PCS and OLM provide additional support for the JVs in Pohnpei.

Country Specific Resources

Books :

- *Making Sense of Micronesia: The Logic of Pacific Island Culture* (2013), Francis X Hezel, SJ. Recommended by current JVs, it addresses common cultural questions asked by westerners based on Fr. Fran's nearly 50 years' experience in Micronesia.
- *Politics in Micronesia* (1983), Ron Crocome and Ahmed Ali. A historical/political description of the individual issues and personalities of the region as a whole.
- *Strangers in their Own Land* (2003), Francis X Hezel, SJ. A social history of the Caroline and Marshall Islands.
- *School on the Hill: Micronesia's remarkable Xavier High School* (2011), Floyd Takeuchi
- *Mister Pip* (2008), Lloyd Jones. Recommended by an FJV, it's a work of fiction about a white man who taught a group of island children using only *Great Expectations*.
- *Surviving Paradise: One Year on a Disappearing Island* (2009), Peter Rudiak-Gould. Recommended by FJVs, it's a memoir of a former World Teach volunteer's experience on an outer island of the Marshall Islands.

Note: This document is available electronically on the Google Drive where you can click on the hyperlinks.

Articles: Large library of online resources at micsem.org, specifically:

- [A life at the Edge of the World](#) (Autobiographical)
- [A Teacher's Tale](#)
- [Christianity in Micronesia](#) (Religion)
- [What are our Priorities?](#) (Political)
- [Cultural Revolution of the 1960s](#) (Social)
- [The Cult of the Individual](#) (Social, Family)
- [Call to Arms: Micronesians in the Military](#) (Social, Political)
- [What Should our Schools be Doing?](#) (Education)
- [Islands of Excellence](#) (Education)

Micronesia Forum: www.micronesiaforum.org

Vid Raatior's blog: www.raatior.com/category/blog

Pohnpei's newspaper: www.kpress.info

Chuuk Women's Council: www.cwcfiinchuuk.org

Videos:

Vanishing Islands: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hFsZmOddAL8>

About the Jesuits specifically: all from the [JesuitsofNewEngland](#) Youtube page

- [An Introduction to Jesuits of Micronesia](#)
- Episode 1: [Faith and Spirituality in Action](#) (includes Fr. Marc Roselli, previous ICC in Chuuk)
- Episode 3: [Preparing for Tomorrow's Leaders](#) (includes Martin Carl, principal of Xavier HS)
- Episode 4: [Jesuits in Service](#) (includes Fr. Dave Andrus, current ICC in Pohnpei)
- Episode 5: [Transformation and New Beginnings](#) (first half about Xavier's history)

