

## POHNPEI, MICRONESIA

### PAULINO CANTERO HOUSE

JV Presence in Microneisa since 1985

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#### 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.

Within Micronesia, there are many different cultural groups. For instance in FSM, there are four states, each uniquely different (culturally). Within one of those states, one can find different cultural groups as well (outer islands vs lagoon or main island). In some placements JVs have the opportunity to interact with many of these different culture groups from outside of the host island. For example, Xavier High School (in Chuuk), the student and staff/teacher population is truly international and representative of many 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 (coconut meat). Spanish explorers encountered the islands in the 1500s, and missionary activities and coconut trade began in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> 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 of Service in this Country

**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.

**Present Communities & Worksites:** JVC currently has **7 JVs** in Micronesia, who live in **2 JV communities** in Chuuk (1) and Pohnpei (1), and serve at **4 worksites**. The two worksites on Pohnpei are Pohnpei Catholic School and Our Lady of Mercy Catholic High School.

**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. Facebook: [https://www.facebook.com/olmchs.pohnpei?hc\\_ref=SEARCH](https://www.facebook.com/olmchs.pohnpei?hc_ref=SEARCH)

**Pohnpei Catholic School** is a primary school for grades 1-8 and is in the process of adding a High School. In August they will have 9th and 10th grades. JVs in recent years have taught 8<sup>th</sup> and 9th grade subjects. The faculty and staff at both schools have a variety of both local and international teachers. Both schools are located on the Catholic mission grounds in Kolonia town. Facebook: [facebook.com/PohnpeiCatholicSchool/](https://www.facebook.com/PohnpeiCatholicSchool/)

## 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.

**Articles:** Large library of online resources at [micsem.org](http://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: [micronesiaforum.org](http://micronesiaforum.org)

Vid Raatior's blog: [raatior.com/category/blog](http://raatior.com/category/blog)

Pohnpei's newspaper: [kpress.info](http://kpress.info)

Chuuk Women's Council: [cwcfiinchuuk.org](http://cwcfiinchuuk.org)

**Videos:**

- Vanishing Islands: [youtube.com/watch?v=hFsZm0ddAL8](https://youtube.com/watch?v=hFsZm0ddAL8)
- Island Soldier: [islandsoldiermovie.com/about-1/](http://islandsoldiermovie.com/about-1/)
- About the Jesuits specifically: all from the [JesuitsofNewEngland](http://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)

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