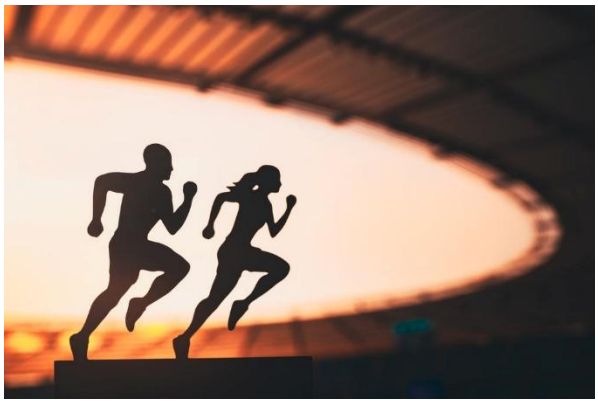
RUNNING

MIND, BODY AND SPIRIT

MY PERSONAL JOURNEY

by

Father Brian Vincenzo Guerrini, ss.cc.
U.S.-West Region
U.S. Province
SS.CC. Community
La Verne, California



Printed in 2026
Copyright © 2026 Father Brian Vincenzo Guerrini, ss.cc.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced by any means, graphic, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping or by any information storage retrieval system without the written permission of the author except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

This book is a work of non-fiction. Unless otherwise noted, the author makes no explicit guarantees as to the accuracy of the information contained in this book and in some cases, names of people and places have been altered to protect their privacy.

Books by Father Brian Vincenzo Guerrini, ss.cc. may be ordered by contacting:

Fr. Brian Guerrini, ss.cc.
Sacred Hearts Community
2150 Damien Avenue
La Verne, CA 91750
909-788-4850

Because of the dynamic nature of the Internet, any web addresses or links contained in this book may have changed since publication and may no longer be valid. The views expressed in this work are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the author, and the author hereby disclaims any responsibility for them.

Any people depicted in stock imagery provided by Getty Images are models, and such images are being used for illustrative purposes only. Certain stock imagery © Getty Images.

All images used in this book are used with the permission of:

Adobe Stock Images (stock.adobe.com)
Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (www.ssccpicpus.com)

ISBN: 979-8-9959266-6-5 (spiral bound, soft cover)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2026912675

Printed by Quality Instant Printing (QIP)
163 W. Bonita Ave.
San Dimas, CA 91773

Contents

Introduction and the Early Years	1
Some Serious Running: Pre-Religious Life (1978-1986)	2
Running After Entering Religious Life (1987-2026)	9
The Mental, Physical and Spiritual Experience of Running	14
The Mental Side of Running	15
The Physical Side of Running	17
The Spiritual Side of Running	19
Epilogue	20
References	22

RUNNING
MIND, BODY AND SPIRIT
MY PERSONAL JOURNEY

Introduction and the Early Years

I didn't anticipate writing this book until after I completed my third Rome (Italy) Marathon (26.2 miles) in March of 2026. But, after I finished the marathon, Father Alberto, the Superior General of my religious order, the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (SS.CC.), suggested I put my experience of running into print. Well, this is it!

I hope to share with you the effects that running have had on my spiritual life as well as on my mental and physical lives in these pages. It has been a journey that I have been on since I was in primary school.

Ever since I can remember, I have always liked to run. It seems I always had a lot of energy growing up and running was a great way to release that energy. I also enjoyed being outdoors in nature and the freedom running provided me.

In primary school, I so looked forward to recess when we students could go outside and run around. We would play high energy running games like "Red Rover" or "Touchman/Tackleman" where we had two lines across the field from each other and would run back and forth either trying to break through the other line or avoid being tagged or tackled. It was the beginning of my running career and journey!

When I got into high school, I ran cross country and track and I liked it when we had to run long distances. It seems God created me to be a distance runner! Once I got out of high school, however, I kind of stopped my running escapades because I got involved in other activities. After four years of college, I went out into the working world and began to get a little more interested in running.

One of my life's dreams, ever since I was a boy, was to run in the Boston Marathon, arguably, the most prestigious marathon in the world. But, you had to qualify for it. And, it just so

happened that, on my first real job out of college, I met a young man who was an experienced distance runner who ran for the University of Michigan cross country team and could run a marathon in under two and a half hours. I began to talk with him about my dream to run in Boston and he agreed to help me with my quest.

Up to this point in my life, running was something I enjoyed doing because it gave me a sense of freedom and independence. It also cleared my mind and focused it with more clarity of thinking. It also was good for meditation. Only later, did I begin to use my running in my spiritual life, once I discovered my relationship with God and the world had become more cemented in my brain and heart.

Some Serious Running: Pre-Religious Life (1978-1986)

Once I had someone to encourage me, I began to set my sights on qualifying for the Boston Marathon. And this young man, Dale was his name, began to share his experience of long-distance running with me. He told me that it is all in feeling comfortable when you run, of getting your breathing to a comfortable pace and relaxing your arms and hands, of seeking a feeling of peace when you run long distance, and, most importantly, he said, ALWAYS SMILE. He said by smiling, you relax your face muscles and that relaxation spreads to the rest of your body. I liked what he was telling me. I liked the idea that running should be a relaxing thing, a more meditational activity, which I already knew from my younger days. From the beginning, I liked running because of these aspects. So, I set upon a course to try to qualify for the world-famous Boston Marathon.

After I graduated from college in 1975, finally finding a job that could use my degree in meteorology, I began to work at various jobs in the air pollution field that needed meteorologists. It was at my first job with the State of Michigan in 1977 that I met Dale, the afore-mentioned young man, who encouraged me to pursue my dream of running in the Boston Marathon. So, I began my running and spiritual journey in earnest in that year of 1977. I began to do some training runs near where I lived. At that time, I had fallen away from the Catholic Church of my upbringing. I didn't go to Mass and Reconciliation regularly. I still prayed a little, but didn't read Scripture or anything that had to do with religion at the time. Then, I began to get into the running, and things began to change, physically, mentally and spiritually. I mean, BIG TIME! I have always been one to throw myself into something, almost, compulsively, you could say. So, I began entering runs in the local area. Just about every weekend, I was running in some race. It became almost a religion for me. Here are some of the stats.

		Number of Races
In the year 1978, I ran:	Marathons (42K*, 26.2 miles)	7
	25K (15.5 miles)	2
	Half Marathons (21K, 13.1 miles)	1
	20K (12.4 miles)	2
	10 miles	2
	9 miles	1
	8 miles	1
	7 miles	1
	6.5 miles	1
	10K (6.2 miles)	9
	5 miles	1
	5K (3.1 miles)	1

(*K = kilometers)

1978 – Pizza Hut Family Marathon (26.2 miles), Bloomington, IN
Time: 3 hrs., 3 mins
(me, towards the end of the race)

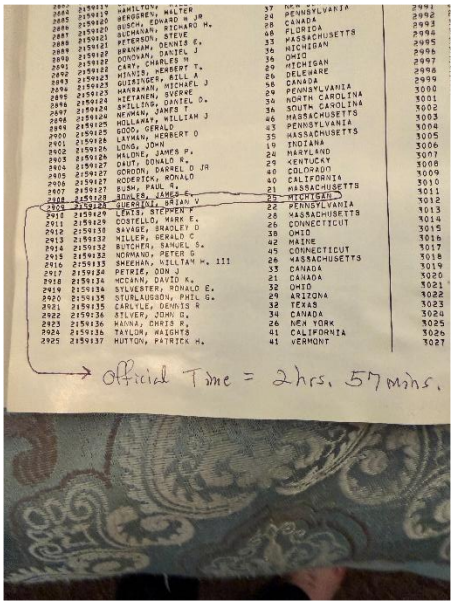
1978 – Maryland Marathon (26.2 miles), Baltimore, MD
Time: 2 hrs, 57 mins
(me, at the finish line)

		Number of Races
In the year 1979, I ran:	Marathons (42K, 26.2 miles)	4
	20 miles	1
	25K (15.5 miles)	1
	Half Marathons (21K, 13.1 miles)	4
	10 miles	1
	15K (9.3 miles)	1
	8 miles	1
	10K (6.2 miles)	9
	5 miles	1
	5K (3.1 miles)	2

Understandably, one had to qualify in order to enter the Boston Marathon. And, at that time, the qualifying time for my age group was 3 hours flat. You had to run a sanctioned marathon (26.2 miles) in under 3 hours in order to qualify for the Boston Marathon. It was quite a goal for me and one which I set my heart on. So, in the two years of 1978 and 1979, I ran 10 or so full marathons to try to qualify for Boston. It was a grueling couple of years, but I finally did

run a marathon in under 3 hours and made it to Boston in 1979! I finally, after a good number of marathons, broke the 3 hour barrier and qualified for Boston in 1978. I was ecstatic! The 1979 Boston Marathon, here I come! So, I traveled with a group of Boston marathoners from Michigan to Boston in April of 1979. What an experience it was! And, I ran my best marathon of all time, 2 hours, 56 minutes and 58 seconds! Not bad for 26.2 miles!

1979 – Boston Marathon (26.2 miles), Boston, MA (My Starting Bib Number)



1979 – Boston Marathon (26.2 miles), Boston, MA (Final Results Booklet)
Time: 2 hrs, 56 mins, 58 secs

All of this while moving from job to job: Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, and California. And, after entering religious life, California, Texas, Hawaii, Fiji, Tonga and India with visits to Italy, Belgium, France and Ireland.

It gave my self-confidence a huge boost and it provided an outlet for my energetic spirit. But, it also, became a source of meditation for me. It was beautiful to be able to run with so many other people for a common cause. Entry fees for these runs usually went to a good cause, in support of a charity or to help kids in school, the homeless, education, medicine, civic organizations, etc. So, it was a win-win activity. It was a win for me physically, psychologically and spiritually, and a win for others. So I kept on running, just like Forrest Gump!

Into the 1980's, 1990's, 2000's and, to this day, I am still running.

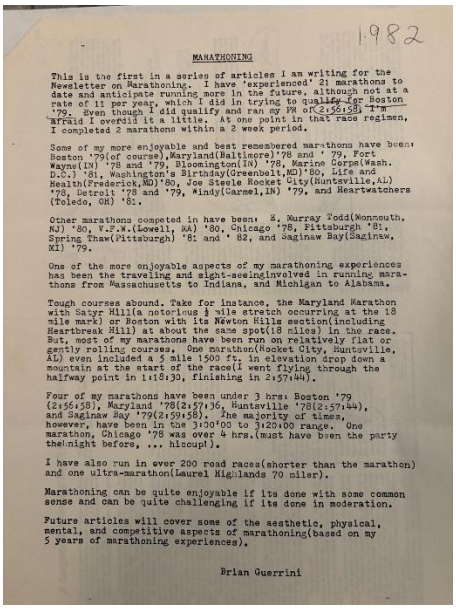
Autograph of Bill Rodgers on my bib #

(Bill Rodgers is a famous world-class distance runner, an Olympian, multiple winner of the Boston and New York marathons and marathon record holder)

Autograph of Frank Shorter on my bib #

(Frank Shorter is a famous world-class distance runner, olympic gold medalist in the marathon in 1972 and silver medalist in 1976)

		Number of Races
In the year1980, I ran:	Marathons (42K, 26.2 miles)	2
	25K (15.5 miles)	2
	Half Marathons (21K, 13.1 miles)	2
	10 miles	4
	9.4 miles	1
	15K (9.3 miles)	1
	7.5 miles	1
	10K (6.2 miles)	11
In the year 1981, I ran:	Marathons (42K, 26.2 miles)	3
	Half Marathons (21K, 13.1 miles)	1
	10 miles	1
	15K (9.3 miles)	1
	10K (6.2 miles)	10
	5 miles	1
In the year 1982, I ran:	Ultra Marathon (did 57.3 of 70 miles)	1
	Marathons (42K, 26.2 miles)	1
	Half Marathons (21K, 13.1 miles)	1
	10K (6.2 miles)	13
	6 miles	1
	5K (3.1 miles)	1
In the year 1983, I ran:	Ultra Marathons (did 46.4 of 70 miles)	1
	Marathons (42K, 26.2 miles)	2
	25K (15.5 miles)	1
	Half Marathons (21K, 13.1 miles)	1
	20K (12.4 miles)	1
	15K (9.3 miles)	1
	10K (6.2 miles)	12
	6 miles	1
	5 miles	3



1982

MARATHONING

This is the first in a series of articles I am writing for the Newsletter on Marathoning. I have 'experienced' 21 marathons to date and anticipate running more in the future, although not at a rate of 11 per year, which I did in trying to qualify for Boston '79. Even though I did qualify and ran my PR of 2:56:58, I'm afraid I overdid it a little. At one point in that race regimen, I completed 2 marathons within a 2 week period.

Some of my more enjoyable and best remembered marathons have been: Boston '79(of course),Maryland(Baltimore)'78 and ' 79, Fort Wayne(IN) '78 and '79, Bloomington(IN) '78, Marine Corps(Wash. D.C.) '81, Washington's Birthday(Greenbelt,MD)'80, Life and Health(Frederick,MD)'80, Joe Steele Rocket City(Huntsville,AL) '78, Detroit '78 and '79, Windy(Carmel,IN) '79, and Heartwatchers (Toledo, OH) '81.

Other marathons competed in have been: S. Murray Todd(Monmouth, NJ) '80, V.F.W.(Lowell, MA) '80, Chicago '78, Pittsburgh '81, Spring Thaw(Pittsburgh) '81 and ' 82, and Saginaw Bay(Saginaw, MI) '79.

One of the more enjoyable aspects of my marathoning experiences has been the traveling and sight-seeinginvolved in running marathons from Massachusetts to Indiana, and Michigan to Alabama.

Tough courses abound. Take for instance, the Maryland Marathon with Satyr Hill(a notorious ½ mile stretch occurring at the 18 mile mark) or Boston with its Newton Hills section(including Heartbreak Hill) at about the same spot(18 miles) in the race. But, most of my marathons have been run on relatively flat or gently rolling courses. One marathon(Rocket City, Huntsville, AL) even included a 5 mile 1500 ft. in elevation drop down a mountain at the start of the race(I went flying through the halfway point in 1:18:30, finishing in 2:57:44).

Four of my marathons have been under 3 hrs: Boston '79 (2:56:58), Maryland '78(2:57:36, Huntsville '78(2:57:44), and Saginaw Bay '79(2:59:56). The majority of times, however, have been in the 3:00:00 to 3:20:00 range. One marathon, Chicago '78 was over 4 hrs.(must have been the party thenight before, ... hiccup!).

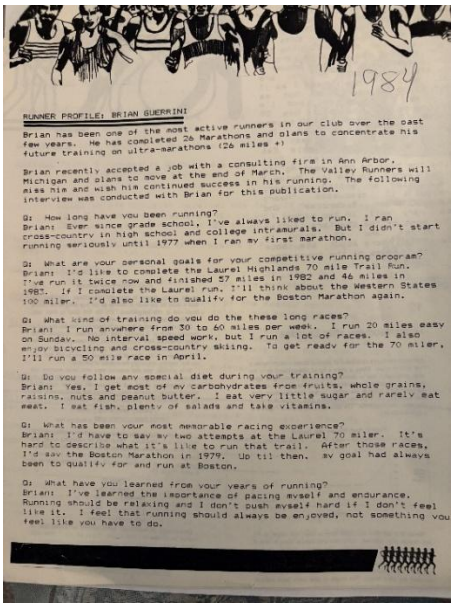
I have also run in over 200 road races(shorter than the marathon) and one ultra-marathon(Laurel Highlands 70 miler).

Marathoning can be quite enjoyable if its done with some common sense and can be quite challenging if its done in moderation.

Future articles will cover some of the aesthetic, physical, mental, and competitive aspects of marathoning(based on my 5 years of marathoning experiences).

Brian Guerrini

An article on Marathoning I wrote in 1982 for the Valley Running Club of Pittsburgh, PA newsletter



1984

RUNNER PROFILE: BRIAN GUERRINI

Brian has been one of the most active runners in our club over the past few years. He has completed 26 Marathons and plans to concentrate his future training on ultra-marathons (26 miles +)

Brian recently accepted a job with a consulting firm in Ann Arbor, Michigan and plans to move at the end of March. The Valley Runners will miss him and wish him continued success in his running. The following interview was conducted with Brian for this publication.

Q: How long have you been running?
Brian: Ever since grade school. I've always liked to run. I ran cross-country in high school and college intramurals. But I didn't start running seriously until 1977 when I ran my first marathon.

Q: What are your personal goals for your competitive running program?
Brian: It's like to complete the Laurel Highlands 70 mile Trail Run. I've run it twice now and finished 57 miles in 1982 and 46 miles in 1983. If I complete the Laurel run, I'll think about the Western States 100 miler. I'd also like to qualify for the Boston Marathon again.

Q: What kind of training do you do the these long races?
Brian: I run anywhere from 50 to 60 miles per week. I run 20 miles easy on Sunday. No interval speed work, but I run a lot of races. I also enjoy bicycling and cross-country skiing. To get ready for the 70 miler, I'll run a 50 mile race in April.

Q: Do you follow any special diet during your training?
Brian: Yes. I get most of my carbohydrates from fruits, whole grains, raisins, nuts and peanut butter. I eat very little sugar and rarely eat meat. I eat fish, plenty of salads and take vitamins.

Q: What has been your most memorable racing experience?
Brian: I'd have to say my two attempts at the Laurel 70 miler. It's hard to describe what it's like to run that trail. After those races, I'd say the Boston Marathon in 1979. Up til then, my goal had always been to qualify for and run at Boston.

Q: What have you learned from your years of running?
Brian: I've learned the importance of pacing myself and endurance. Running should be relaxing and I don't push myself hard if I don't feel like it. I feel that running should always be enjoyed, not something you feel like you have to do.

[redacted]

A runner profile written about me in 1984 for the Valley Running Club of Pittsburgh, PA newsletter

From 1984 to 2000, I ran in a much less number of races than in the previous years:

	Number of Races
Marathons (42K, 26.2 miles)	5
Half Marathons (21K, 13.1 miles)	3
8 miles	2

In 1986, I entered the Novitiate of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary in Hemet, California, USA and began my religious life as a brother of the Sacred Hearts Community. In 2008, I was ordained to the priesthood.

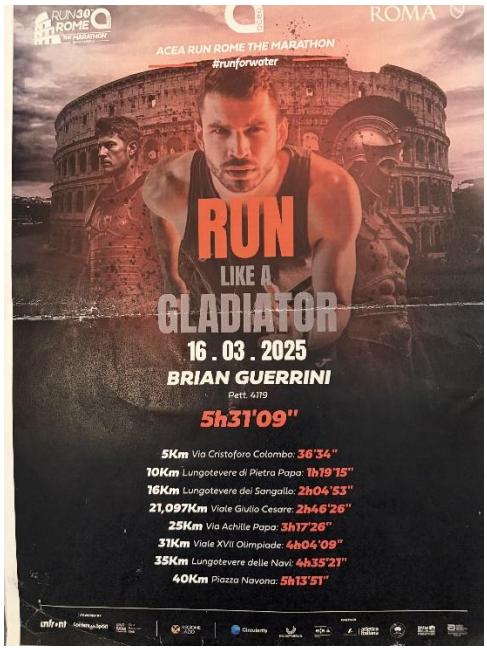
Running After Entering Religious Life (1987-2026)

From 1986 to 2024, I took a lengthy hiatus from year-round serious running. My ministry in the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts took precedence in these years as I served in schools, missions, parishes and in formation in California, New Mexico, Texas, Tonga, Fiji and Hawaii (on the island of Molokai). What running I did do was purely recreational except for the 10 races listed above.

After I returned to California (Los Angeles) from the island of Molokai in Hawaii, where I was stationed for the three years of the COVID pandemic (2019-2022), I felt an urge to get back into serious running. It all started in 2024, with the Rome Marathon. At the time, I was helping with sacramental ministry in a number of parishes in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and visiting hospitals in the area. I was also writing books on some of the history of the Congregation (on Molokai, in California, in the U.S., in the missions, in the world). I went to our Motherhouse in Rome to work on research for my books in our General Archives in 2024, 2025 and 2026. My first time completing the Rome Marathon, in 2024, after an almost 40 year hiatus, began my comeback into serious running, at the age of 70! Better late than never!

From 2024 through the summer of 2026, I began to run races again and found that I could still do them. It was a great boost for my mental, physical and spiritual lives. During these two and half years, I ran:

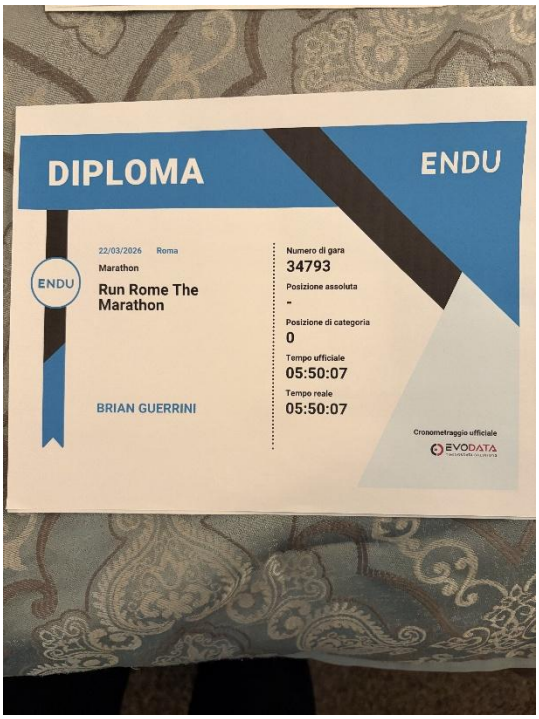
	Number of Races
Marathons (42K, 26.2 miles)	5
Half Marathons (21K, 13.1 miles)	5
7 miles (Trail Run)	2
10K (6.2 miles)	6
5K (3.1 miles)	8



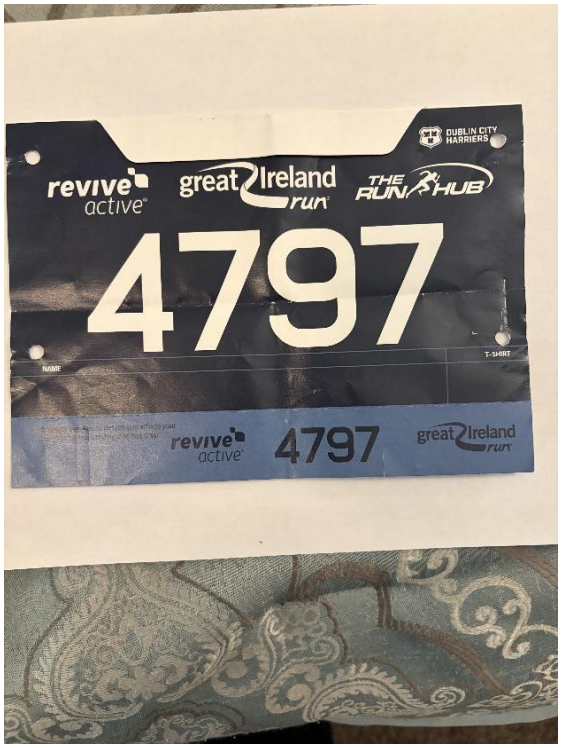
Rome (Italy) Marathon (26.2 miles), March 16, 2025
(Finisher Certificate)
Time: 5 hrs., 31 mins. 9 secs.

Catalina Island, CA Half Marathon (13.1 miles), November 8, 2025
(My Bib #)

Honolulu, HI Marathon (26.2 miles), December 14, 2025
(Finisher Certificate)(Time: 5 hrs., 51 mins., 42 secs.)



Rome (Italy) Marathon (26.2 miles), March 22, 2026
(Finisher Certificate and Bib #)(Time: 5 hrs., 50 mins., 7 secs.)



The Great Ireland 10K Run, Dublin (Ireland), April 12, 2026
(Finisher Certificate)(Bib #)(Time: 1 hr., 3 mins.)

Hometown Half Marathon (21K, 13.1 miles), Ft. Worth, TX, May 17, 2026

(Bib #)(Time: 2 hrs., 18 mins., 33 secs.)

Glendora, CA Memorial Day 5K (3.1 miles), May 25, 2026

(Bib #)(Time: 27 mins., 40 secs)

From 1978 through 2026, I have run in various long-distance races in the following states and foreign countries:

States	Foreign Countries
Alabama	Ireland
California	Italy
District of Columbia	
Florida	
Hawaii	
Illinois	
Indiana	
Maryland	
Massachusetts	
Michigan	
New Jersey	
New York	
Ohio	
Pennsylvania	
Texas	

I continue to run. In fact, I have many runs scheduled through the rest of 2026. Let me now share with you some of what I have experienced, continue to experience and will experience in my running days to come, especially in the area of how my running effects my personal spiritual life as a religious priest.

The Mental, Physical and Spiritual Experience of Running

There have been many highs and lows in my running, affecting me physically, mentally, psychologically and spiritually. It has been, however, a deeply felt experience in all three areas, mind, body and spirit – the trinity of healthy concerns. Take care of your mind, take care of your body and take care of your spirit. This is the age-old axiom that has been practiced in all cultures. And, running, for me, did just that. It cleared and focused my mind. It strengthened my body. And, especially, it renewed my spirit. Let me start with the mind.

The Mental Side of Running

When I run, I find that my mind begins to focus better. It becomes clearer and less cluttered. I begin to focus on things that I need to focus on, important things. I find that while I am running, I am thinking of how I am going to mentally pace myself for this run. My mind begins to tell my body to relax and my breathing to slow down. I begin to notice some of my surroundings, the people, the houses, the scenery, the sounds. My mind begins to clear of any negative feelings. I even begin to think about the future. What will I be doing the rest of the day? What will I be doing tomorrow, next week, next month? Images of people from the past begin to appear sometimes in my thoughts. I reflect upon past experiences as well. What was I doing last week? Where was I last week? Who was I with last week?

The mental processes during the early years of my running spanned a wide range of areas and emotions. Starting with determination and toughness. It takes a strong mental will to push oneself through a run, especially when the body is saying "It's time to stop!" and one hits the proverbial "wall." As I gained more and more experience in running, and with some good coaching, however, I learned that relaxation was more important in running than anything else. Also, the mentality that one must "keep on running and not stop" was a predominant practice in my early running days. So, I tended to push myself mentally. It was mind over matter. "I can do this!" But, as I gained more experience in running, I realized that the mind can be a detriment to good running. The mind may not allow the spirit to take over the pace of the run, to allow a spirit of peace and calm to lead me to the finish line. There were times when I felt that my stress level was going up rather than going down during a run. Maybe it was the pressure of trying to qualify for Boston and my competitive nature that were getting the best of me. What I do know, however, and have experienced, was the so-called "runner's high", a release of beta-endorphin chemicals in the brain after a good, long workout like running a distance race, that gave one a feeling of contentment and positivity. During strenuous activity, your body releases beta-endorphins, hormones synthesized in the pituitary gland. Acting as natural painkillers and mood elevators, they help the body manage the physical stress and pain associated with intense exercise. It was almost drug-like in its effect and would last for some time afterwards. This feel-goodness of prolonged and exertive physical activity was addictive. In fact, there was a point when I felt that I was addicted to running, that I needed my running "fix." Mentally, it became a drug for me. Eventually, I cut back somewhat on my running to ease the mental stress it was causing me.

Yes, running became a drug for me, I guess. But, it was a good drug. And, it raised my self-esteem and my capacity for human connection. Coming to a run, I look forward to being with other people who I am running with, young, old, males, females, families, dogs. And, the support one gets from the spectators and supporters along the course is worth every step I take. Mentally, it is a stimulus for feeling good about myself, others and the world. But, it took many years to go from the competitive to the recreational runner. Don't get me wrong. I still have that competitive spirit to run a little bit faster than last time, but, now I tell myself to just take it easy and enjoy the run. Start out real slow. You can always pick it up later. I have found that it is much more enjoyable to run in this way and to just enjoy the surroundings.

In my mind, I try to just let go of everything and to just be in the moment. It is more peaceful and calm now in my mind every time I run. Mentally, I have shifted from determination to enjoyment, from grit to seeking more satisfaction in my running. Especially, now that I am in my seventies, running has become something of a source of recreation more than a job to do and accomplish. Although, it still challenges me mentally, physically and spiritually every time I run. But now, I really look forward to it, not as an escape or as a goal, but as a therapy session for the soul.

The mental aspects of running can run the gamut of emotions, from pain to ecstasy. It can be very much like the Paschal journey of the Son of God, the Christ, from life to death, from death to life, from resurrection to crucifixion, from crucifixion to resurrection. One feels the body suffering while one feels the mind soaring. It is in seeking the union of mind, body and spirit that ultimately is the goal of running, I believe. When all three – mind, body and spirit are soaring – that is what some eastern religions might call "nirvana." I am not there yet, but I am getting there. And, it has become more enjoyable. As I approach my mid-seventies and look forward to my eighties, God-willing, I tell myself, as I told myself when I turned seventy, that my goal is to be able to complete a full marathon when I turn eighty, just as it was when I turned seventy.

Psychologically and emotionally, running for me has been a big part of my life and it continues to be, as long as I am physically and mentally able to do it. It is a positive force in my dealing with stress and internal conflicts. Running, for me, calms me down and allows me to find more clarity in my thinking and more grounded-ness in my feelings. It helps me solve problems and find solutions. The mental benefits are many and it has helped me numerous times to strengthen my mental capabilities. But, the mind is not the only part of my being that reaps the benefits of long-distance running. My body also claims some benefits.

The Physical Side of Running

Along with the mental effects of running, there are, obviously, the physical effects of running. And, for me, I have been blessed with a strong pair of legs. Like Forrest Gump, God gave me a good pair of legs to run with. For me, the physical exertion of running creates a mantric activity that slows down my breathing and helps me to relax. It is an activity that exercises my whole body – my legs and arms, my entire upper and lower body. The constant motion of legs and arms is like a metronome keeping time to music. The rhythmic breathing of other runners in addition to my own plays out a song of physical effort and fatigue along the course of a run. Keeping the body moving physically is an important part of staying healthy just as keeping the mind active is an important part of mental health.

Of course, too much physical activity, like anything done in excess, has its consequences. I was blessed not to have any serious problems with my legs and body as I participated in the runs over the years. There were times, however, when my body was really sore and tired. There were other times when I felt my body could run forever. In running long distances, physiologists say that the body (and mind) reaches a point beyond which it can seemingly go no further, the proverbial "wall." It is when the energy supplies (glycogen) in your muscles become depleted and makes it harder and harder to keep your muscles moving. The leg muscles slow down drastically and the legs become much heavier and harder to move. I have hit the "wall" many times in running, especially in marathons and longer distances. That is why one should load up on the energy supply of carbohydrates before a long run, to prevent this. The facts are:

During Exercise: Your muscles burn glycogen for energy. Protein plays only a minor energy role during exercise, stepping in primarily if you run out of glycogen (carbohydrates) during long, intense workouts.

During Recovery: Protein repairs the micro-tears caused by training. When you eat protein alongside carbohydrates after a workout, the combination can actually enhance the rate at which your body restores its muscle glycogen.

Lactic acid is actually a vital fuel source. Your muscles, heart, and brain can recycle lactate and convert it back into glucose for energy.

The "Burn": While lactate itself does not cause pain, the hydrogen ions produced alongside it cause the pH of your muscle tissue to drop. This temporary acidity is what creates the burning sensation during strenuous bursts of activity.

The soreness you feel 24 to 48 hours after a tough workout is called Delayed Onset Muscle Soreness (DOMS).

DOMS is caused by microscopic tears in your muscle fibers and the resulting inflammation, not by trapped lactic acid.

So, when one runs long distances, your muscles are extremely vulnerable to fatigue and soreness, during the run and after the run.

I have even run races when I was sick. Not a good experience! But, the show must go on! Many times I have felt like stopping, but the finish line always beckons me to continue. And, if it wasn't for the spectators along the way encouraging the runners' physical exertion to endure, shouting words of encouragement like, "Way to go!" and "You can do it!" and "Almost there!", I don't know if I would have been able to endure.

There is such a strong connection between the physical and the mental that one cannot run without both working together. My running "coach", Dale, once told me that you have to think relaxed, to think comfortable, because it is the mind that controls the body even when the body seems to control the mind. He told me that, in running any race, if you feel comfortable and relaxed at the halfway point of the run, then you will make it to the finish line for sure. His words of wisdom have helped me through some of my most trying physical runs.

I remember times when I was ready to give up because my body could not go on any more, like in the Chicago Marathon one year, when, running through some of the ethnic neighborhoods, I began to get sick to my stomach from the smells and odors in the streets, even almost vomiting at one point. But, I made it to the finish line. And, the time when I ran a marathon in Fort Wayne, Indiana in 90 degree heat. And, the time when I ran a marathon in Carmel, Indiana in below zero Fahrenheit temperature. And, the time I ran the Harlingen, Texas Marathon and ran the last half of the race with an excruciatingly painful left foot. Yes, distance running can be a formidable challenge for the body and to be blessed with the capability to do it is a gift from God. The physical demands of running on a hard surface, which is usually the case for most runs, unless it is a trail run, requires a good pair of legs and, most importantly, a good pair of comfortable, well-cushioned and light weight running shoes, the most valuable equipment for a long distance runner.

But, also, I remember the physically exhilarating times when my body felt like it was floating above the ground and through the air. Like the Huntsville, Alabama Marathon where the first half of the race was a drop of 800 feet from the top of a mountain or the Maryland Marathon where a hill called "Satyr Hill", a 400 foot incline over just half a mile in length that one had to run up at the 18 mile mark of the race. And, of course, "Heartbreak Hill" at the Boston

Marathon. "Heartbreak Hill" is a notorious 0.4-mile climb located between miles 20 and 21 of the Boston Marathon in Newton, Massachusetts. It is infamous not for its extreme steepness—it has about an 88-foot elevation gain with a 3.3% to 4.5% grade—but for appearing late in the race after runners' legs are already heavily fatigued. And, there were so many other challenging portions of the courses I ran. These are but a few. But, the physicality of this type of running was many times brutal, especially on the legs. However, my legs survived, thanks to my mental toughness, but also, to my spiritual side.

The Spiritual Side of Running

And, now we come to the aspect of running which, I feel, is somewhat underappreciated. And, that is, the spiritual side of running, an aspect of distance running that has grown to be a bigger part of my running. But, it is a different type of spirituality, not the Hail Mary and Our Father praying of the Rosary, but a more intercessory type of spirituality. Because we have so much to pray for in our world today, so what else is new, I use my running as an opportunity to think of people, places and things to pray for. In the spirituality of my religious community, the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, we have as part of our charism or spirituality, a call to what we call "reparative adoration". A lot was going on in the world of our Founders in France back in the late 18th century, specifically, the French Revolution. It was a time of chaos. And, for our Founders, it was a time to adore God for his love and ask for reparation for the sins of humanity. It was, in a way, intercessory prayer. Also, Saint Padre Pio used intercessory prayer for the sake of suffering throughout the world. So, when I run, I say prayers for a particular intention. It is a way of spiritual health for me and it sustains me as I am running. I also say a prayer for the runners, the organizers and the spectators and supporters of the run.

Spiritually, over the many years of running, I have discovered that running provides a good opportunity to communicate with God as well as to feel a real connection with people. At the start of a race, to see hundreds, thousands and even tens of thousands of people preparing to exercise through city streets, through the countryside, along oceans and rivers, in the mountains, and even on top of mountains, gives me a sense of our common humanity and connectedness with the divine.

There is one trail run that I have run for the past two years that, literally, finishes in the clouds on the top of a mountain at over 10,000 feet elevation. It gives my spirit a feeling of being with God, although my body is totally spent and I am struggling to breathe. But, spiritually, I really feel close to God. And, those along the way, are an inspiration to the soul. The name of the trail run is the Mt. Baldy Run to the Top Trail Run. Over just 7 miles, the participants travel up

over 4,000 feet, starting at the parking lot of the ski lift at 6,000 feet elevation and finishing on the summit of Mt. Baldy, the highest mountain in Los Angeles County at just over 10,000 feet in elevation. Makes me tired just thinking about it!

And, then, there were the two ultra-marathons in Pennsylvania, where we ran along a portion of the Appalachian Trail. The run was a 70-mile trail run. I attempted it two times, both with a Pittsburgh running club. It was a spiritual experience unlike any other! The first year, I completed 57.3 of the 70 miles. I spent 14.5 hours on the trail. The second year I completed 46.4 miles of the trail. I always remember praying along the way, hoping that I would make it to the finish. The first year, after reaching the 30 mile mark on the trail, I began to sing the Marian hymn, "Immaculate Mary", over and over again. In fact, I think I even began to hallucinate at that point. No apparitions, though! It was, however, a spiritual encounter for me in the woods of western Pennsylvania!

Spiritually speaking, running is an activity that can satisfy the hungry soul. It provides a means of escaping from the worries of this human world and enter the peace and calm of the divine world. The rhythmic breathing, the mantric pounding of feet against the ground, the beauty of nature and of being outdoors and the escape of tension and worry from the mind and body all create an atmosphere conducive to meditation, and even to contemplation. Yet, it is an activity that brings one closer to the connection between the divine and the human. It is, first and foremost, a physical activity, but, really, if you think about it, it is just as much a mental and spiritual activity as it is a physical one.

Epilogue

This is the essence of running for me! In religious life, one has the opportunity to discover more and more the divine within the human, the human within the divine. It is a privilege to journey with others through their pain and suffering, through their joys and happy times, in sacramental and ministerial settings. Running is an opportunity to release personal stresses and worries, to de-stress. Running is a therapy session. It is a spiritual direction session. It is a liberating experience for the mind, body and soul. Psychologically, physically and spiritually, it is a wonderful way to experience life that many runners would attest to.

In my continuing journey as a religious priest, I find running to be a great help to me in discovering my place in the world and my place within my community and with God. It affords me the opportunity to let it all out, to purge myself of any negative thoughts and feelings and to let in the positive. In this little book, I hope to have conveyed some of my

personal experiences of running and would like to encourage, especially young people, to take up running as a companion in their life's journey. It has helped me immensely, to ground me, to support me, to encourage me and to give me hope in a world that needs hope!

Keep on running!!!!!!!!

Father Brian Vincenzo Guerrini, SS.CC.
Sacred Hearts Community
La Verne, California, USA

References

Thanks to the Internet, some information in this book was obtained through Google searches. Most of it is from personal experiences and reflections on those personal experiences. It is also a short chronology of my running over the years and an inspiration to me to keep going.

Other books by Father Brian Vincenzo Guerrini, ss.cc.:

God and Life on the Pecos – westbowpress.com & amazon.com - a book that explores finding God and life in the past, present and future along the Pecos River of southeastern New Mexico, a frontier region of the American West that earned a reputation for being wild, unexplored and rebellious (ala "there is no law west of the Pecos") as it had been for thousands of years under Native-American, Spanish, Mexican and American control. It is a book that gives the reader a glimpse into the lives and struggles of living faith in this part of the "Land of Enchantment", or, "Satan's Paradise", as the U.S. New Mexico Territory was labeled.

The Sacred Hearts (SS.CC.) Missionary Story: Beyond France and Europe, The First Missionaries of SS.CC. in Foreign Countries, A Chronology, 1819 to the 21st Century, 200+ Years of SS.CC. Missionary Activity – amazon.com & direct from the author – a book that chronicles the missionary history of the SS.CC. in foreign lands beyond France and Europe from 1819 to the 21st century. It offers a chronology of the missionary activity of the SS.CC. as well as some of the missionaries and their circumstances of living out the missionary life in foreign lands. It gives a glimpse of what it meant to be an SS.CC. missionary in the world. Many images of persons, places and activities involved in these missionary journeys are also included.

The Sacred Hearts (SS.CC.) Story in California: 1832 to the 21st Century, A Chronology – amazon.com & direct from the author – a book that chronicles the missionary history of the SS.CC. in California when it was still a part of Mexico as well as when it was a U.S. Territory and a State from 1832 to the 21st century. It offers a chronology of the missionary activity of the SS.CC. as well as some first-hand experiences of missionary life in California. It also lists people and places and contains many images of these people, places and activities.

Beyond the Leprosarium! The Sacred Hearts (SS.CC.) Story on Molokai: 180+ Years of Love, A Chronological History from the 19th to the 21st Centuries – amazon.com & direct from the author – a book that chronicles the missionary history of the SS.CC. on the Hawaiian island of Molokai from the mid-1800's to the 21st century. It offers a chronology of the missionary activity of the SS.CC. as well as some first-hand experiences of missionary life on the island of Molokai, where victims of leprosy were banished starting in 1866 and where Father Damien ministered to them. It also lists people and places and contains many images of these people, places and activities.

Seeing the French School of Spirituality of the 17th Century in the Charism of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (SS.CC.) through the Letters of the Good Father and Good Mother – amazon.com & direct from the author – a book that connects the charism and spirituality of the SS.CC. with the French School of Spirituality of the 17th century and in the letters of the two founders of the SS.CC., the Good Father (Fr. Pierre Coudrin, ss.cc.) and the Good Mother (Henriette Aymer de la Chevalerie, ss.cc.)

A History of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (SS.CC.) in the United States of America (U.S.A.) from 1830 to 2025 – amazon.com & direct from the author – a book that chronicles the missionary presences and some of the history of the SS.CC. in the United States of America from 1830 to 2025, state by state.

Among the Nations of the World: The SS.CC. Global Presence from 1800 to 2026 – amazon.com & direct from the author – a book that chronicles the missionary presences and some of the history of the SS.CC. around the globe from 1800 to 2026.

Multicultural Counseling in Ministry – amazon.com & direct from the author – a book that addresses the challenges of pastoral counseling in a multicultural context and offers some suggested techniques for multicultural counselors.

Sports Psychology – Spirituality - Health

This is a book that addresses the topic of connecting running with a healthy mind, body and spirit. It is the story of a personal journey with running as a source of mental, physical and spiritual growth as a lay person and as a religious. It chronicles the running exploits of a priest of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (SS.CC.) and shares his insights, experiences and feelings when running. It is the story of one man's journey, both external and internal, in the pursuit of well-being and wholeness in life and his faith journey as a religious priest.

Father Brian Vincenzo Guerrini, ss.cc. is an ordained member of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (SS.CC.), a worldwide Catholic religious order dedicated to contemplating, living and proclaiming the compassionate love of God in the world through the hearts of Jesus and Mary. He has been stationed in places like California, New Mexico, Texas, Hawaii (Molokai), Indiana, Fiji, Tonga and India. He was the national coordinator of the Sacred Heart Communities in Collaboration (SHCC) and Executive Director of the St. Vincent de Paul Society of the Pecos Valley, Inc., both for six years. From 2019 to 2022 (the years of the COVID pandemic), he was the pastor/administrator of St. Damien of Moloka'i parish and missions on the Hawaiian island of Moloka'i and has taught at 'Api'fo'ou College in Nuku'alofa, Kingdom of Tonga, St. Joseph Notre Dame High School in Alameda, California, Cardinal Ritter High School in Indianapolis, Indiana, and Damien High School in La Verne, California. He has also been a priest-in-residence at the Pacific Regional Seminary (PRS) in Suva, Fiji. He is currently in residence at the Sacred Hearts community at Damien High School in La Verne, California. He is the author of several books chronicling religion and God in Southeast New Mexico and the history of the SS.CC. on Moloka'i in Hawaii, in California, in the United States, in foreign lands and across the globe, as well as books on the connection between the French School of Spirituality of the 17th century and the charism and spirituality of the SS.CC., Multicultural Counseling in Ministry and Running for Mind-Body & Spirit.