Catholic actor Peter Boyle dies at age 71

NEW YORK (CNS) — Peter Boyle, who was once a Christian Brother before he pursued a career in acting, died Dec. 12 at New York Presbyterian Hospital. Boyle, 71, had been suffering from multiple myeloma and heart disease.

Boyle became familiar to U.S. television audiences as perpetually cranky Frank Barone, the father of Ray Barone, on the sitcom "Everybody Loves Raymond" (1996-2005). The show lasted nine seasons, filming 201 episodes.

But Boyle had a fine career in movies, breaking out into stardom as the title character of the drama "Joe" (1970), and reaching a zenith playing the singing, dancing monster in "Young Frankenstein" (1974).

He also had major roles in the movies "Taxi Driver," "The Candidate," "F.I.S.T.," "The Brink's Job," "Turk 182!" "Honeymoon in Vegas," "While You Were Sleeping" and "Monster's Ball," and played Father Time in all three "Santa Clause" films.

On television, Boyle specialized in playing historical figures in made-for-TV movies, including Sen. Joseph McCarthy in "Tail Gunner Joe," Adm. John Poindexter in "Guts and Glory: The Rise and Fall of Oliver North" and David Dellinger in "Conspiracy: The Trial of the Chicago 8." He portrayed Howard Hanssen in "Master Spy: The Robert Hanssen Story." He also was featured in the TV miniseries version of "From Here to Eternity."

After seeing how audiences cheered when his character in "Joe" went on a violent rampage, he turned down the role of Popeye Doyle in "The French Connection" and other films that glamorized violence.

In a 2005 interview, Boyle, a Christian Brother for five years — he went by the name Brother Francis de Sales, the same name as the Philadelphia parish of his boyhood — Boyle said he was lax in the practice of his Catholic faith for much of his adult life until 1999.

That year, he said, “I had a heart attack … and after that, I decided I wasn’t going to fool around anymore, and got myself back to Mass.”

A 1957 graduate of LaSalle College — now University — in Philadelphia, the school’s communications department gave him its Shining Star award in 2005. Boyle’s first stage experience was in a parish Christmas pageant. “Theater and religious ritual are very connected,” he said. “It’s the using of an inner process to express an outer reality, or something mysterious.”

As a young actor, Boyle joked that his Christian Brothers experience was an asset. “It prepared me for a life as a struggling actor,” he said. “When I first went to New York, I wasn’t starving but I really got into that vow of poverty.”

Boyle met his wife, Loraine Alterman, when as a reporter for Rolling Stone magazine she visited the “Young Frankenstein” set for a story. Through Alterman’s friendship with Yoko Ono, Boyle became best friends with her husband, John Lennon, who was the best man at their 1977 wedding.

Survivors include his wife and two daughters, Lucy and Amy.

A private funeral was to be held in New York, and plans also called for a memorial service.