Jean Carol Phelan was born on August 13, 1930 in Chicago, one of four children to Chicago natives, parents Margaret and Bernard Phelan. She was baptized two weeks later at St. Alphonsus Church. At school age, she was enrolled in St. Alphonsus School run by SSND. Jean had an aunt who was an SSND and in her autobiography noted, “The sisters were not at all new to me. Their presence and my desire to be one of them were equally taken for granted in my own mind…” On September 11, 1944 Jean entered the Aspiranture at Longwood and two years later, her class entered the Candidature in Milwaukee.

Sister Jean ministered as a teacher for 25 years in the Milwaukee and Chicago areas. She also worked in pastoral ministry for 20 years before taking on a leadership position at the provincialate for nearly a decade. She was active in community service at Marian Village where she has been currently residing.