Nora Curtin was born on October 12, 1929 in Chicago, the fourth child of ten, to parents, Susan Murphy from Ireland and Cornelius Curtin from Chicago. She was baptized at St. Margaret of Scotland Chicago three weeks later. She attended an SSND-staffed parish school and upon graduation from the eighth grade, she followed her two older sisters to the Academy of Our Lady High School. In all, the Curtin family had a Jesuit son and three SSND daughters.

Nora entered the congregation in August 1946 at the motherhouse in Milwaukee and professed first vows three years later. Sister Joan Marie ministered as a teacher, administrator, director of religious education and librarian for thirty years.

In her late 40s, she became profoundly deafened. Gradually after a few years of training in speechreading and sign language, she taught students who were deaf for almost a decade before helping take care of retired sisters at St. Stanislaus in Chicago. She now resides at Marian Village in Homer Glen, Illinois ministering in prayer and presence. Sister Joan is on the left, pictured with her two sisters, Susan Marie, SSND and Margaret Ann, SSND.