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## MEDIA RELEASE

### St. Mary's University Creates Woitas Centre for Inclusive Education

#### First of its kind in Western Canada, New Centre Supported by Largest Donation to Inclusive Education in Canadian History

EMBARGOED UNTIL 11:00 a.m., DECEMBER 11, 2024

**CALGARY** – *December 11, 2024* – Today, St. Mary's University celebrated Clayton and Linda Woitas for their historical \$7,000,000 donation to establish the Woitas Centre for Inclusive Education in the university's Faculty of Education.

Dr. Sinda Vanderpool, President and Vice Chancellor of St. Mary's University, told the crowd at the groundbreaking announcement that today marks a transformational moment for education in Alberta.

"St. Mary's University is deeply grateful to Clayton and Linda Woitas for their outstanding generosity and vision to significantly shape how inclusive education is delivered to K-12 students in schools across Alberta and beyond," said Vanderpool. "With their investment, St. Mary's is poised to become a leading voice in advancing classrooms and learning spaces that help every student thrive."

The new Centre will help address one of Alberta's most pressing priorities: training more teachers and equipping them with the knowledge and the strategies that are needed to transform classrooms across the growing province.

The university's Dean of Education, Dr. Laurie Carlson Berg, expressed her excitement at how the Woitas Centre will be a hub for innovation that offers specialized programming and resources for educators, administrators and families.

"Our Bachelor of Education students, and teachers who already are in the classroom, will have access to the latest tools, insights and professional development opportunities designed to empower all students to succeed." she said. "It will be a world-class resource."

That's exactly what donors Linda and Clayton Woitas had in mind when they made the decision to wholly establish the \$7 million fund to create the Centre as soon as possible and support its activities long-term.

"Every child deserves the opportunity to succeed in a learning environment that values and respects their unique abilities and perspectives," said Linda Woitas, adding "It is our hope that this Centre will inspire collaboration, innovation and a shared commitment to excellence in education."

Expected to open in 2025, the Woitas Centre for Inclusive Education will start by partnering with southern Alberta's school districts, not-for-profit organizations and advocacy groups. With oversight from Vice President Academic, Sandy Vanderburg, the Centre will ensure that the latest research, strategies and tools are being applied at the grassroots level.

Said Vanderpool when sharing how St. Mary's was built on community partnerships dedicated to support learning and academic success: "Our university aims to foster a dynamic and responsive learning ecosystem, supporting educators as they foster the potential of every student. Thanks to Clayton and Linda, the Woitas Centre for Inclusive Education will help us do that."

More than 150 government officials, community partners, educators, alumni, and students attended today's special ceremony at St. Mary's University to honor donors Clayton and Linda Woitas and celebrate the university's milestone achievement.

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**About St. Mary's University:**

St. Mary's University is an innovative teaching and research university located on a historic site in Calgary, Alberta. Established in 1986, it provides affordable, accredited and highly valued degrees in the Liberal Arts, Sciences and Education. Firmly rooted in the Catholic intellectual tradition, St. Mary's inspires students to combine academic excellence with a passionate commitment to ethics, service, social responsibility, and respect for diversity of opinion and belief. In 2024, 91% of Bachelor of Education students secured employment in the field upon graduation.