



**GREAT PLAINS ANNUAL CONFERENCE**  
of The United Methodist Church

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July 28, 2021

Sisters and Brothers of the Great Plains Conference,

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, Redeemer and the Great Physician.

As many of you no doubt have noted, the infection rate from the delta variant of the COVID-19 virus has surged in recent weeks. In response, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention this week issued a new recommendation that all people — including those fully vaccinated — wear masks when indoors in areas where infection rates have soared. This includes the eastern third of Kansas and some areas of Nebraska, including Omaha and Grand Island.

This reversal of previous guidelines reflects the growing caution surrounding the resurgence of the virus, and it requires our collective attention. In this new season of the COVID-19 pandemic, I urge leaders in our local churches to pay close attention to their local health departments. At this point, health officials are not urging the suspension of in-person worship or other in-person activities. But in many cases they are urging residents to wear masks when indoors, even if fully vaccinated.

As I have shared in the past, you must make the decision that makes the most sense for your context for ministry. Some areas in both of our states are among the least impacted in the entire country by the delta variant. But others are among the most at risk.

Please educate your congregations about this risk. Consider wearing masks when inside the church building. Ask those who have declined thus far to prayerfully consider being vaccinated. And, of course, continue to serve the mission fields to which you have been deployed to show the love, grace and hope found in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Peace,

Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr.

