

Core Plus Fixed Income Commentary

December 31, 2020

MARKET REVIEW

Despite a global pandemic and a horrible start to the year, the capital markets managed to shrug off a deep recession caused by a shutdown of the economy to turn in an impressive performance for the year. Indeed, most every asset class apart from commodities and oil ended the year with positive returns.

Equity markets led the charge with an impressive rebound off the lows seen on March 23. At that point, the S&P 500[®] Index was down 30.3% year to date. Thanks to massive amounts of monetary stimulus—the Fed took interest rates to zero and restarted an aggressive quantitative easing program—and generous fiscal support, the S&P 500 rebounded to finish the year up 18.4%. The technology heavy NASDAQ led the parade, finishing the year up 45.1%. The stimulus was not just limited to the United States as many countries joined the fray by providing monetary and fiscal support. This allowed the MSCI Emerging Market Index to return 18.5% for the year, while its EAFE Index struggled to produce an 8.4% return for the year.*

Most of the major fixed income indices performed well as investment grade bonds, both domestically and globally, had positive returns for the year. Even the Bloomberg Barclays High Yield Bond Index finished the year up 7.1%, despite the default rate climbing significantly during the year. According to CreditSights, the trailing 12-month issuer-weighted high yield default rate moved from a rather pedestrian 3.11% as of 12/31/19 to 7.3% as of 11/30/20.

During the fourth quarter, some interesting pro-cyclical rotations were beginning to take shape in asset allocation that may be setting the stage for new leadership in 2021. Small cap stocks had an impressive 31.4% return during the final quarter of the year to lead stocks. Many of these smaller companies are levered to an economic reopening and they typically perform well in the early stages of economic recovery. Although bonds had a great year, by the fourth quarter, the rally seemed to be running out of steam with the Bloomberg Barclays Aggregate Bond Index returning just 0.7% for the quarter. Even though commodities had a negative return for the year, they did return 13.0% during the fourth quarter as measured by the CRB Commodity Index. These observations of lackluster bond returns, along with stellar commodity return, could be interpreted as the market beginning to sniff out deflation and inflation caused by the massive amounts of money creation and fiscal stimulus provided by monetary authorities and governments.

PORTFOLIO REVIEW

The Core Plus Composite returned 2.93%, net of fees, for the quarter ending December 31, 2020. The Composite's benchmark, the Bloomberg Barclays U.S. Aggregate Bond Index, returned 0.7% during the same period.

The portfolio's allocation to preferred securities and corporate bonds were both positive contributors to relative performance during the quarter. Preferred securities benefited from the market's risk on orientation, outperforming all other fixed income sectors within the portfolio. Corporate bonds, specifically the airline, banking, and energy sectors, benefited from the hunger for yield from investors, resulting in credit spreads tightening throughout the period.

The portfolio's position in U.S. Treasury TIPS was also a positive contributor to relative performance as concerns of inflation and higher interest rates emerged following the U.S. elections.

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STRATEGY INFORMATION

Benchmark	Bloomberg Barclays U.S. Aggregate Index
Business Minimum	\$15M
Number of Holdings	232
Assets	\$112.33M

PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT TEAM


John L. Cassady III, CFA

 Chief Investment Officer
 Industry start date: 1987
 Joined Red Cedar: 2018

Jason M. Schwartz, CFA

 Senior Portfolio Manager
 Industry start date: 2004
 Joined Red Cedar: 2018

David L. Withrow, CFA

 Director of Portfolio Management
 Industry start date: 1988
 Joined Red Cedar: 2018

Michael J. Martin, CFA

 Senior Portfolio Manager
 Industry start date: 1994
 Joined Red Cedar: 2018


INVESTMENT PHILOSOPHY

“We seek income producing opportunities in the capital structure, in a variety of risk profiles where we find relative value in an effort to reduce correlation to traditional bonds.”

—David Withrow

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A drag to relative performance was our overweight to the securitized sector.

The portfolio's allocation to the municipal sector was also a slight drag on performance.

STRATEGY POSITION & OUTLOOK

While financial markets may experience some bumps to start the year as political discord continues and widespread distribution of COVID-19 vaccines is not as smooth as planned, we expect risk assets to ultimately continue their outperformance as reflation benefits from the efforts of monetary authorities, fiscal policy, and scientists globally.

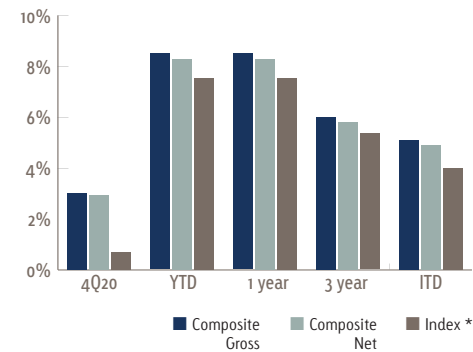
The portfolio is overweight corporate bonds relative to the benchmark. We intend to maintain this exposure, seeking to opportunistically take advantage of market conditions by adding to exposure on market weakness and selling positions when price targets are reached.

During the quarter, we added to the portfolio's overweight position in preferred securities. We intend to maintain this exposure, seeking to opportunistically trade between \$25 par securities and hybrids.

The portfolio is overweight the financial sector. We believe the companies in this sector will benefit from a steeper yield curve that results from global reflation.

U.S. investment grade corporate bond issuance topped \$1.8 trillion in 2020, breaking all records. Issuance for 2021 is expected to be around \$1.4 trillion as of 12/31/20, similar to 2019 levels.

PERFORMANCE



Period	Composite Gross	Composite Net	Index *
4Q20	2.99%	2.93%	0.67%
YTD	8.48%	8.27%	7.51%
1 year	8.48%	8.27%	7.51%
3 year	5.99%	5.80%	5.34%
ITD	5.08%	4.88%	4.00%

Source: Clearwater Analytics

Inception Date 5/1/16

*Bloomberg Barclays U.S. Aggregate Index

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DISCLOSURES

*All end-of-year index data noted is as of 12/31/20.

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Index Definitions: Bloomberg Barclays U.S. Aggregate Bond Index: Broad-based, market capitalization-weighted bond market index representing intermediate term investment grade bonds traded in the U.S. S&P 500 Index: Broad-based measurement of changes in stock market conditions based on the average performance of 500 widely held common stocks. MSCI Emerging Markets Index captures large and mid-cap representation across 27 EM countries. The index covers approximately 85% of the free-float-adjusted market capitalization in each country. EAFE Index is a stock market index that is designed to measure the equity market performance of developed markets outside the U.S and Canada. CRB Commodity Index is a commodity futures price index. It acts as a representative indicator of today's global commodity markets. Bloomberg Barclays High Yield Bond Index measures the USD denominated, high yield, fixed rate corporate bond market. NASDAQ Composite: Market capitalization-weighted index of over 3,000 common equities listed on the NASDAQ stock exchange.

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