

## 2020 3rd Quarter – Economic & Market Commentary

October 12, 2020

It has now been more than six months since the World Health Organization declared the global COVID-19 pandemic, upending our home and working lives. As the initial wave of infections subsided and the spread of the virus stabilized through the summer months in most parts of Canada, we adapted to the “new normal.” Heading into the fall, infection rates in some Canadian provinces are rising again, raising the possibility of further restrictions to limit the spread of the virus. Amidst the ongoing uncertainty, I truly hope that you and your family are keeping well and staying healthy.

### Capital markets in the third quarter

Recovering from the pandemic-related downdraft of the first quarter, financial markets enjoyed a period of relative calm and optimism through of the summer of 2020. Equity prices in many markets continued to improve, with some sectors moving sharply higher as lockdown restrictions eased and economic activity gradually resumed. Toward the end of the third quarter, however, investor concerns resurfaced. Markets were rattled by growth in the numbers of COVID-19 infections, uncertainty related to the upcoming U.S. presidential election and the expected economic stress of reductions in government supports for businesses and individuals.

Most global equity markets started the quarter positively, led largely by investor optimism for sectors expected to benefit from current conditions, such as technology and health care. The S&P 500 Index, a broad representation of the U.S. equity market, reached an all-time high in early September before volatility resurfaced as the quarter drew to a close. The U.S. index finished the three-month period up 6.6% for the quarter and 8.4% for the year-to-date in Canadian dollar terms. The MSCI World Index, which reflects returns for developed equity markets around the globe, followed a similar path, and was up 5.7% for the quarter and 4.9% for the year-to-date.

In Canada, the S&P/TSX Composite Index also trended higher through much of the summer, buoyed by sectors such as materials (precious metals), industrials (transportation companies) and consumer staples. Despite continued weakness in the energy sector and broader market volatility later in the quarter, the Canadian benchmark finished three-month period with a gain of 4.7% but remained down 3.1% for the year-to-date.

Central banks around the world continued to gauge the ongoing economic impact of the pandemic in setting monetary policy. The U.S. Federal Reserve, for example, noted that the U.S. economy had picked up considerably, but much depends on the confidence of consumers to spend. The central bank indicated that it would allow inflation to exceed 2% as the economy recovers and that its target interest rate would be left unchanged at 0-0.25% for “an extended period.” The Bank of Canada also kept its benchmark interest rate steady during the third quarter at 0.25% and said it would continue its large-scale government bond purchase program designed to promote liquidity in the financial system. The decline in interest rates has supported bond prices over the past several quarters, resulting in the FTSE Canada Universe Bond Index, a broad measure of Canadian government and corporate bonds, to return 0.4% for the quarter and 8% for the year-to-date.

#### **What can we expect going forward?**

So far, 2020 has reminded us of several important lessons, one of which is that timing the market is essentially impossible. Many people around the world considered selling their investments shortly after the U.S. market declined nearly 34% in March, believing that a recovery would be a long way off. But from the lowest point on March 23, the S&P 500 turned around and took just 140 days to recover – the fastest rebound on record.

Investors who chose to stay invested were once again rewarded for their patience, while those who allowed their emotions to ultimately dictate their actions and sold their holdings at that point in time, would have locked in losses.

Looking ahead, the COVID-19 pandemic is far from over and will likely have an impact on investment markets for months to come. Governments and central banks continue to provide support for the economy through accommodative fiscal and monetary policies, but the economic outlook remains cloudy, particularly if further restrictions to limit the spread of the virus become necessary. For this reason alone, keeping a long-term view and sticking close to our investment process of focusing on both quality and prices, will be especially important in the months and years to come.

In closing, I will take this opportunity to (1) thank you for trusting us to help you manage your investments, and (2) remind you that Amanda and I are always here to help. Should you have any questions regarding your portfolio, please do not hesitate to contact us at the office.



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