

VICTORY CORE PLUS INTERMEDIATE BOND FUND

QUARTERLY COMMENTARY



As of December 31, 2023

Executive Summary

Fixed income concluded 2023 with a bang! Fourth quarter inflation reports trended lower, and as the Federal Reserve (the Fed) kept rates stable the market regained confidence after a frustrating third quarter. Positive performance was driven by a downward swing in the Treasury curve, pushing yields down. Against this backdrop, the Victory Core Plus Intermediate Bond Fund (Institutional Shares) underperformed its benchmark, the Bloomberg U.S. Aggregate Bond Index, for the quarter ended December 31, 2023. See next page for other share classes.

Market Update & Commentary

Shifts in monetary policy expectations defined the fourth quarter of 2023, leading to a sense of optimism going into 2024. Unemployment slid to 3.7%, and the Consumer Confidence Index rose in December to highs not seen since 2021. All these factors, taken together, fostered greater investor confidence in a soft-landing narrative.

The Consumer Price Index, a popular measure of prices paid (and, thus, inflation), declined to 3.1% from 3.7% during the fourth quarter, indicating that the Fed continues to inch toward its target of 2% inflation. As a result of moderating inflation and a resilient economy, the Fed held rates steady during its meetings during the quarter. These factors led to positive returns within the fixed income market, with November turning out to be the best month for bonds since the 1980s. The remarkable returns can largely be attributed to the downward shift seen in Treasury yields from the 10-year Treasury's peak of 5% in October. This historic rally continued through December and was sufficient to swing fixed income's performance for the full calendar year to the black for the first time since 2020. While the dramatic shifts along the yield curve observed during the fourth quarter might give investors pause when considering fixed income, current yields still present a historically attractive opportunity, even if not at October's high of 5%.

Market expectations for rate cuts in 2024 steadily increased throughout 4Q23 on the Fed's decision to pause and a belief that the hiking cycle has reached completion. Many market participants believe rate cuts are coming soon, and this confidence was an important factor in the positive momentum that drove fixed income and equities higher. At the beginning of the quarter the market priced in two to three 25-basis point (bps)* cuts in 2024, but the quarter ended with interest rate traders pricing federal funds futures for nearly seven cuts. Victory Income Investors, though, believes that the Fed remains data dependent, as it was reiterated at the December Federal Open Market Committee meeting that future monetary policy decisions will hinge on seeing "further evidence to build confidence that inflation is moving down sustainably." Chairman Powell also emphasized the Committee's meeting-by-meeting decision process in his reminder that should economic circumstances change, keeping rates higher for longer is not off the table entirely.

	Yield (%)	Spreads (bps)			Returns (%)	
		12/31/2023	9/30/2023	Δ (+/-)	3M	1YR
Investment Grade (Moody's Ratings)						
U.S. Treasury	4.1	-	-	-	5.7	4.1
U.S. Aggregate	4.5	42	52	-10	6.8	5.5
U.S. Credit	5.0	93	111	-19	8.2	8.2
Corporate	5.1	98	120	-22	8.5	8.5
Aa	4.6	47	57	-10	8.3	7.0
A	4.9	84	105	-20	8.2	7.7
Baa	5.3	121	146	-25	8.8	9.5
Crossover	6.0	183	235	-52	8.0	11.2
High Yield (Moody's Ratings)						
U.S. Corporate High Yield	7.8	323	395	-72	7.2	13.4
Ba	6.4	201	265	-64	7.4	11.6
B	7.7	317	396	-79	7.0	13.8
Caa	12.6	751	846	-94	6.9	19.8
Ca-D	19.5	1,173	1,145	-271	5.1	16.4
Structured Product						
U.S. MBS	4.7	46	66	-20	7.5	5.0
ABS	5.0	68	66	+2	3.5	5.5
CMBS	5.3	126	131	-5	5.2	5.4

Source: Bloomberg

Credit spreads tightened across fixed income asset classes apart from asset-backed securities (ABS) in the fourth quarter. Tighter credit spreads indicate lower compensation for taking on additional risk. Fixed income outperformed in the fourth quarter, driven by a falling yield curve. The decline was sufficient to swing full-year returns in the Bloomberg U.S. Aggregate Bond Index to +5.5% when the index had concluded the first nine months of 2023 at -2.1%.

*Basis point "bps" is 1/100th of a percentage point.

Portfolio Performance & Positioning

During the quarter, we increased our allocation to U.S. Treasuries and agency residential mortgage-backed securities (RMBS), as well as other asset-backed securities. We also reduced our positions in high yield, senior secured bank loans, and corporate credit.

Contributors

- Our security selection within corporate credit, as well as an underweight to Treasuries, aided performance. Within corporate credit, banking, media and technology were the best performing sectors and benefited from our security selection.
- From a credit perspective, our allocation to BBB-rated credits and high yield most impacted performance.
- Allocation added the majority to performance.

Detractors

- Sectors that detracted from performance included utilities and agency residential mortgages.
- From a credit perspective, AAA, AA and A bonds slightly detracted from performance due to the impact of changes to the Treasury curve.
- Duration hindered performance, as the Fund's portfolio is overweight the belly of the curve (7- and 10-year key rate portions) versus the benchmark index, which has more exposure to the long end.

Standardized Performance: December 31, 2023

Average Annual Returns (%)

Victory Core Plus Intermediate Bond Fund	Ticker	Inception Date	Q4 2023	1 Year	5 Year	10 Year	Since Inception	Expense Ratio Gross	Expense Ratio Net
Fund Shares	USIBX	08/02/99	6.33	7.16	2.78	2.86	4.83	0.67	0.66
A Shares, without sales charge	UITBX	08/02/10	6.28	6.90	2.52	2.59	3.54	0.93	0.92
A Shares, with sales charge (max. 2.25%)	UITBX	08/02/10	3.90	4.45	2.07	2.35	3.37	0.93	0.92
C Shares	UITCX	06/29/20	6.10	6.32	—	—	-1.03	2.82	1.56
Institutional Shares	UIITX	08/01/08	6.23	7.24	2.84	2.93	4.85	0.62	0.59
R6 Shares	URIBX	12/01/16	6.39	7.53	3.03	—	2.99	0.44	0.42
Bloomberg U.S. Aggregate Bond Index	—	—	6.82	5.53	1.10	1.81	—	—	—

Past performance does not guarantee future results. The performance quoted represents past performance and current performance may be lower or higher. The investment return and principal value will fluctuate so that an investor's shares, when redeemed, may be worth more or less than the original cost. To obtain performance information current to the most recent month-end, visit www.vcm.com. Returns include reinvestment of dividends and capital gains. Performance for periods greater than one year is annualized. Fee waivers and/or expense reimbursements were in place for some or all periods shown, without which fund performance would have been lower. Class C Shares are subject to a deferred sales charge of 1.00% on shares redeemed within the first year. Performance would have been lower if it reflected this charge for the applicable period(s). Net expense ratio reflects the contractual waiver and/or reimbursement of management fees through August 31, 2024.

Carefully consider a fund's investment objectives, risks, charges and expenses before investing. To obtain a prospectus or summary prospectus containing this and other important information, visit www.vcm.com/prospectus. Read it carefully before investing.

Not all share classes are available to all investors.

All investing involves risk, including the potential loss of principal. In addition to the normal risks associated with investing, fixed income securities are subject to interest rate, inflation, credit and default risk. The bond market is volatile. Bonds and bond funds will decrease in value as interest rates rise and vice versa. Credit risk refers to the possibility that debt issuers may not be able to make principal and interest payments or may have their debt downgraded by ratings agencies. High yield securities may be more volatile, be subject to greater levels of credit or default risk, and may be less liquid and more difficult to sell at an advantageous time or price than higher-rated securities of similar maturity. The Fund is also subject to liquidity risk, which is the risk that the Adviser may not be able to sell a security at an advantageous time or price, which may adversely affect the Fund. The value of your investment is also subject to geopolitical risks such as wars, terrorism, environmental disasters, and public health crises; the risk of technology malfunctions or disruptions; and the

responses to such events by governments and/or individual companies.

The Bloomberg U.S. Aggregate Bond Index (Bloomberg U.S. Aggregate) measures the investment grade, USD-denominated, fixed-rate taxable bond market. The index includes Treasuries, government-related and corporate securities, MBS, ABS and CMBS.

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