

FLAHERTY & CRUMRINE PREFERRED INCOME OPPORTUNITY FUND

To the Shareholders of Flaherty & Crumrine Preferred Income Opportunity Fund (“PFO”):

While the first fiscal quarter¹ began on a very weak note, with fixed-income markets (including preferreds) down sharply in December 2018, markets did a 180-degree turn as the Fed changed its tune on monetary policy. Rebounding prices were broad-based and more than made up for weakness in December, and investors are once again on a hunt for yield. Total return² on net asset value (“NAV”) for the first fiscal quarter was 5.9%, while total return on market price was 3.1%.

As discussed in our Annual Report dated November 30, 2018, there were many factors contributing to weakness in 2018. A few of them continue today, including a global economic slowdown, ongoing trade wars, and continuous political headlines from both sides of the aisle. However, the Federal Reserve’s unexpected pivot on its outlook for future rate hikes and size of its balance sheet (System Open Market Account (SOMA) portfolio) deserve most of the credit for the market’s sudden mood change. As of its March 20 meeting, the Federal Open Market Committee estimates no rate increases in 2019 and one 0.25% hike in 2020, which would leave the year-end 2021 fed funds rate 0.5% below earlier projections. It also plans to halt SOMA reductions in October 2019, an earlier end point than previously expected.

The Fed’s revised positions on rates and SOMA have been followed by similar policy statements from the European Central Bank (ECB). Investors globally have shifted expectations and now expect government officials to keep close watch over economies and markets with continued dovish monetary policies. The result has been lower, and remarkably stable, Treasury rates and a dramatic re-tightening of credit spreads.

Flow data on money going into and out of markets and investment products from late-2018 indicate many may have underestimated the degree of concern among investors. Outflows, particularly from corporate credit fixed-income funds, were substantial and help explain the magnitude of market weakness. Flows back into markets in 2019 have been impressive as well, although thus far they have fallen short of making up for late-2018’s outflows.

Macro factors have been driving markets, and there is little new to say about the Fund’s portfolio. Our allocations continue to focus on credit quality and structure – both of which remain healthy – and portfolio turnover remains low. The economic outlook and related macro factors – such as global monetary policy and trade – should continue to have an outsized impact on our market’s direction over the near-term.

Credit fundamentals for most issuers of preferreds are strong, and we expect them to remain resilient even if the pace of economic growth slows over the next several years. Supply of newly-issued preferreds should remain very manageable, providing technical support to the market. Combined with competitive yields, tax advantages, and benign credit conditions, we believe the case for preferreds as an income investment remains intact.

Sincerely,

The Flaherty & Crumrine Portfolio Management Team

March 29, 2019

¹ December 1, 2018 – February 28, 2019

² Following the methodology required by the Securities and Exchange Commission, total return assumes dividend reinvestment.