



Message from the Chief:

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

Welcome to the first UC San Diego Division of Gastroenterology & Hepatology newsletter of 2020. We closed out 2019 with so many phenomenal accomplishments, awards and honors. Last year the division reached almost 25 million in research funding; well over 300 unique publications; expanded its clinic visits, procedures and transplant volume; as well as wRVU production was at the highest the division has ever seen. Our Division strives to be nationally recognized through its faculty as well as innovations that will improve the care of patients with gastrointestinal and liver diseases nationwide.

As we embark on 2020, we continue to push the envelope to grow and thrive as a division. In this edition, we highlight several faculty and staff for their outstanding contributions and accomplishments. I am also excited to introduce you to new staff, our incoming FY21 fellows and advanced fellows. In addition, we will provide you with updates to SDDRC and our upcoming divisional events.

A challenge we currently are facing is the impact of Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) and how it effects patient care and our community. During this public health crisis, leadership is closely monitoring the progression of the virus. The health and well-being of our patients and community is our priority. Please be aware if you are traveling, check the latest travel advisories at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices>.

We welcome your feedback, ideas and news for future issues — please connect with us at wjones@health.ucsd.edu. I want to personally thank you all for everything you do and hope you enjoy reading what the division has been doing.

Sincerely,

William J. Sandborn, MD
 Professor and Chief, Division of Gastroenterology
 Vice Chair for Clinical Operations, Department of Medicine
 Director, UCSD IBD Center, UC San Diego Health System

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WELCOME MERCEDES ROBERTS, MBA DIGESTIVE DISEASE PRACTICE MANAGER

For the past 7 years, Mercedes managed medical practices and clinics in both the U.S. and abroad, for both military and civilian non-profit organizations. Her most recent work for the children's hospital in Kansas City was to manage the legal compliance of the hematology section, its pharmacy grant program, and the subsequent financial accounting for over \$10M in revenue. In that role, she quickly became the regional liaison for legal compliance, financial accounting, and quality improvement projects. She takes pride in mentoring staff to attain their professional goals and likes to leave no stone unturned when it comes to forward progress. Being new to San Diego, she is open to recommendations on things to see and do. But for now, you can find her on the dog beach every weekend with her German Shepherd Roxy (about whom she will never cease talking - fair forewarning) and hiking with her husband. She is so excited to be joining such a wonderful team! She hopes you enjoy your holidays and looks forward to working with all of you!



WELCOME DIANE AMENG NURSE MANAGER MEDICAL SPECIALTIES



Diane Ameng is the new RN Nurse Manager over the GI/Hepatology/Urology Specialty Groups in the Care Navigation HUB. Diane has come to UCSD from San Diego County Emergency Medical Services where she worked as a Quality Assurance Specialist. Prior to working for the County Diane worked for 16 years at KPOncall, the 24/7 urgent/emergent telephone triage call center for the Kaiser Permanente Southern California Region. Diane developed, implemented and maintained the screening, hiring and training program for the telephone triage nurses. In addition to the recruiting, hiring and training role Diane transitioned into an Account Manager role functioning as the liaison between call center operations and the respective service areas within the Southern California region. Diane's clinical career began in the

Emergency Department and included working as a CNI in the ED at UCSD Hillcrest from 1989-1998. There she performed the role of staff nurse, charge nurse, and mobile intensive care nurse (MICN). Also during that time she was a member of the local disaster medical response team (DMAT) where she responded to the Northridge earthquake providing medical support to emergency departments impacted by the disaster. It has always been Diane's plan to return to the telemedicine world and she was delighted to be hired as the new RN Manager for medical specialties in the Care Navigation Hub. Diane enjoys international travel, entertaining and being a grandmother.

Faculty Spotlight: Dr. Veeral Ajmera



UCSD Gastroenterology and Hepatology is proud to highlight one of its outstanding faculty leaders, Veeral Ajmera, MD. Since joining the University in July 2017, Dr. Ajmera has made significant contributions to research and has taken on an important clinical leadership role as medical director of liver transplantation at UCSD. Amongst his research accomplishments are the publication of over fifteen journal articles including his first-authored work in such notable journals as *Hepatology*, *Journal of Hepatology*, *Gastroenterology* and *Gut*. His research and other career achievements have been recognized nationally with the “Future Leader in NAFLD” award

at the Nash-TAG Conference and he has successfully transitioned from an AASLD Clinical and Translational Research Award to a Career Development Award, K23, from the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. In addition, he is currently spearheading a chronic liver disease genetics consortium between UCSD, the Broad Institute, MGH, and Duke University.

Dr. Ajmera has played a key leadership role in the growth, modernization, and overall improvement of patient outcomes since being appointed the medical director of liver transplantation in 2019. The growth in liver transplant volume and outcomes at UCSD has been notable in recent years. The department has gone from 35 adult liver transplants in 2017 to 62 in 2019 with dramatic improvements in patient and graft survival. In addition, initiatives to expedite the listing of patients with hepatocellular carcinoma have been undertaken, dramatically decreasing the median time from evaluation to listing from over four months to just 23 days. Additionally, Dr. Ajmera has worked directly with programmers on the development of a mobile application that houses all of the liver transplant protocols and policies. Under Dr. Ajmera, the Hepatology group has continued their reputation of excellent patient satisfaction and he is one of three faculty in the GI division with an overall 12 month 5-star rating from patients.

On a personal note Dr. Ajmera is an avid college and NBA basketball fan. In addition, he is currently learning to sail. He and his wife celebrated the birth of their second daughter, Alina Ajmera, on November 1, 2019.



Updates from the San Diego Digestive Diseases Research Center (SDDRC)

Since the latest newsletter in December 2019, The San Diego Research Center has grown bigger, adding four new members for a current total of 47 members. The Center would like to welcome the following new members:

- Veeral Ajmera, MD
- Gen-Sheng Feng, PhD
- Todd Coleman, PhD
- Karsten Zengler, PhD

Congratulations to the 2019-20 Pilot & Feasibility awardees:

The Pilot/Feasibility program has awarded a total of \$250,000 to the following investigators with promising research projects in the digestive diseases:

Collaborative Awards:

- **Hiutung Chu, PhD**, Assistant Professor, Department of Pathology
- **Mamata Sivagnanam, MD**, Associate Professor, Department of Pediatrics
Joint Project Title: "Mini Guts: Understanding the Effects of Bacteria and Human Milk on Intestinal Health"

Innovative Awards:

- **Debanjan Dhar, MD**, Assistant Professor, Department of Medicine
Project Title: "The Role of TREM2/TyroBP+ Macrophages in NASH Development"
- **Rena Yadlapati, MD**, Associate Professor, Department of Medicine
Project Title: "The Oral Microbiome in Esophago-Pharyngeal Reflux"

Jon I. Isenberg Fellowship Award:

- **David Gonzalez, PhD**, Assistant Professor, Department of Pharmacology
Project Title: "Meta-omics Reveals Microbiome-Driven Proteolysis as a Contributing Factor to Severity of Ulcerative Colitis Disease Activity"

The next round of Pilot Feasibility grants for the academic year 2020-21 will be announced in the fall of 2020

The review committee is finalizing the decision on the applications received for 2019-2020 Technology Development Grant and will announce the awardee shortly

Updates from the SDDRC Continued

Our next seminar will be on “Extra Cellular Matrix Metabolism in Liver Disease: The Search for New Biomarkers and Mechanisms,” presented by Dr. Gavin Arteel. The seminar is scheduled on 3/23/2020 at noon in the Biomedical Science Building – Garren Auditorium.

The Centers’ most recent workshop was on 3/9/2020. The topic was on biostatistics and was led by Drs. Xin Tu, and Xinlian Zhang Professors of Biostatistics.

The Center hosted its first symposium on 2/28/2020 at MET Lower Auditorium, followed by a reception dinner at UCSD Great Hall. The following distinguished speakers be presented:

Host-Microbial Interactions in GI Tract:

Rob Knight, PhD: “Microbiomics and Metagenomics in Inflammatory Bowel Disease”

Mitchell Kronenberg, PhD: “Regulation of the microbiome and mucosal homeostasis by a member of the TNF receptor superfamily”

John Chang, MD: “A pathogenic CD8+ tissue-resident memory T cell differentiation state in ulcerative colitis revealed by single-cell RNA and antigen-receptor sequencing analyses”

Mechanisms of Liver Injury:

Jacquelyn Maher, MD: “Population-based investigation of NAFLD using iPSC-derived hepatocytes”

Rohit Loomba, MD: “Role of microbiome in human NAFLD progression”

Tatiana Kisseleva, MD, PhD: “Lineage-specific transcription factors suppress activation of hepatic stellate cells during liver fibrosis”

Please visit our website <http://sddrc.ucsd.edu> for up-to-date information about the Center and its upcoming events. Please send all questions to sddrc@health.ucsd.edu

Hypnotherapy for Integrated GI Health



Dr. Bortniker and Dr. Yadlapati are piloting a hypnotherapy group therapy program for patients with functional/hypersensitive esophageal conditions and IBS. Our very own Dr. Bortniker, certified in hypnosis by the ASCH, will provide hypnosis to groups of 4 to 8 patients at the UCSD Rancho Bernardo clinic. Ideally, patients will participate in seven 30 minute sessions occurring every 1-2 weeks. Their goal is to expand this program across GI conditions and to ultimately offer group therapy and one-on-one hypnosis sessions across UCSD locations. E-mail Dr. Bortniker and Dr. Yadlapati for more details.

Awards & Recognitions



Dr. Loomba was elected to the American Society for Clinical Investigation. Congratulations on this milestone achievement in your career!



Congratulations to Dr. Denise Kalmaz on becoming the San Diego GI society Secretary/Treasurer for 2020.

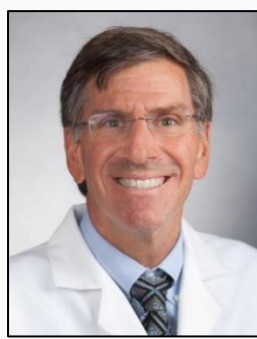
Dr. Boland will be honored by the San Diego Chapter of the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation as their 2020 Physician of the Year at their Champions of Hope event in March.



Congratulations to Dr. Veeral Ajmera who was recognized as a 2020 "Future Leader in NAFLD" at the NASH-TAG Conference.



Dr. Vipin Kumar was elected Editor-in-Chief of one of the oldest (40 years) and reputed review journals in Immunology, Critical Reviews in Immunology. Kudos!



Cheers to Dr. Thomas Savides who was named by Becker's Hospital Review "25 Hospital and Health System CXOs to Know in 2020".



Stephanie Dremel, MSN, RN was recently elected to the National Board of Directors of the American Nursing Informatics Association ("ANIA") in November. She started her term as West Region Director effective January 1st, 2020. ANIA is a professional organization focused on advancing the field of nursing informatics through education, research, and practice in all roles and settings. Stephanie has her Masters of Nursing degree in Nursing Informatics and has been an active member of ANIA for 6 years, including being a founding member of the local San Diego chapter and San Diego Chapter President for the past 2 years.

Dr. Thomas Savides Honored

Steve & Lori Schulman have committed to a \$200K gift to La Jolla Family House in honor of Dr. Thomas Savides. They have elected to name the dining room the *Thomas J. Savides, MD Community Dining Room*. The La Jolla Family House at UC San Diego Health is set to open spring 2020 and will offer a welcoming refuge for families of patients seeking care at our La Jolla medical campus. The goal is to provide all



the comforts of home: a place to sleep and rest, a kitchen to prep meals, a spot to do laundry, and community spaces where guests can interact with other families facing similar challenges.

Staff Spotlight: Stephanie Reed, MPH, RN, CNML

Congratulations to Stephanie Reed, MPH, RN, CNML, who began her new position in February as the Nurse Manager of Thornton Special Procedures and the Motility Lab. Previously, she served as the Nurse Manager of the Perlman Gastroenterology/Hepatology Clinic and in 2018 she also started managing clinical staff at the Care Navigation Hub. She was part of a workgroup that piloted UC San Diego Health's new ambulatory care model that centralized scheduling staff and RN triage staff in one location for the purpose of facilitating communication among the teams and providing immediate service to our patients. Originally from Western Colorado, Stephanie earned her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Mesa State College (Colorado) and a Master of Public Health from SUNY Albany (New York). Prior to working at UC San Diego Health, she lived in upstate New York for 13 years and served in various managerial roles at Albany Medical Center, including Manager of Acute Inpatient Dialysis, Outpatient Pediatric Dialysis, and Apheresis/Outpatient Infusion Transfusion. She moved with her husband (and dog Liberty) to California in 2017 to be closer to family, and enjoy the sunny weather. Stephanie says she is grateful for her nursing career, likes the challenges that come with working in a fast paced academic environment and thoroughly enjoys working with the Gastroenterology and Hepatology

Systems Updates

Kuali Research (KR) and Kuali Conflict of Interest (Kuali COI) launched in January 2020. These new integrated contract and grants management and conflict of interest systems will enhance our research efforts while reducing administrative burdens. For questions on Kuali Research please contact Nicole Joyce at njoyce@ucsd.edu and for questions on Kuali COI please contact Jennifer Ford at jiford@ucsd.edu.

Faculty Spotlight: Rena Yadlapati, MD, MSHS

Rena Yadlapati MD MS is an Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine at UCSD, and Medical Director of the Esophageal Diseases and Motility Program. Within UCSD, Dr. Yadlapati's primary initiative is to establish the Center for Esophageal Diseases, which serves as a premier site for state-of-the-art patient care, innovation, research and education. Dr. Yadlapati's clinical expertise includes gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), esophageal motility disorders, and eosinophilic esophagitis. She speaks and teaches at a national level on the interpretation of esophageal high-resolution manometry and ambulatory reflux monitoring, and is regarded as a key opinion leader in functional lumen imaging planimetry (FLIP).



Dr. Yadlapati's research objective is to define novel phenotype-based personalized care paradigms for esophageal diseases. Her work has included clinical trials and research studying biomarkers, diagnostic tools and non-invasive therapeutic strategies for GERD and extra-esophageal reflux funded by the ACG, NIH and extramural foundations, and resulted in over 70 peer-reviewed publications. Dr. Yadlapati's long-term goal is to be an independently funded investigator and oversee a multi-disciplinary clinical-translational research program in aero-digestive esophageal conditions.

Passionate about bridging high-quality care across disciplines, Dr. Yadlapati dedicates a significant portion of her time to quality metrics and guideline development at the national and international level. Dr. Yadlapati is Co-Chair of the international Chicago Classification version 4.0 working group and a member of the ANMS-ENMS international consensus for PPI refractory GERD. Dr. Yadlapati is a trained GRADE methodologist for the ACG, and a co-author of the 2020 ACG Achalasia as well as Esophageal Physiologic Testing guidelines. Dr. Yadlapati serves on the board of directors of the ACG Institute, the American Foregut Society, and is an Editorial Board Member of *Gastroenterology*.

Following internal medicine residency training at UCLA, Dr. Yadlapati went to Northwestern University for her clinical gastroenterology fellowship where she also completed a 2-year T32 research fellowship in esophageal physiology and psychology as well as an advanced esophageal clinical fellowship, and obtained a Masters in Health Services and Outcomes Research. Prior to joining UCSD, Dr. Yadlapati was an Assistant Professor at the University of Colorado.

Welcome to our incoming FY21 Advanced IBD Fellows



Please join us in extending a warm welcome to our incoming FY21 Advanced IBD Fellow, **Dr. Ariela Holmer**. Soon after Ariela started her internal medicine residency at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City, she knew she wanted to pursue a career in inflammatory bowel disease. She was inspired by great IBD physicians around her, and was motivated to learn as much as possible about inflammatory bowel disease patients. When it came time for fellowship applications, she instantly knew that UCSD would provide the best GI training and exposure to a world-class IBD center.

Despite long hours of call and inpatient consults as a first year GI fellow, she always genuinely looked forward to caring for IBD patients. From the incredible faculty, to endless research and clinical opportunities, Ariela had no doubts that she wanted to stay at UCSD for her advanced IBD year. She can't believe that GI fellowship is almost over, but she is so excited and looking forward to the upcoming year of IBD!

Outside of the hospital, she loves spending Saturdays at the Little Italy farmer's market. Also, she is always on the hunt for great new restaurants to try, and is still on a mission to find San Diego's best burger!

Please join us in extending a warm welcome to our incoming Advanced IBD Fellow, **Dr. Nghia Nguyen**. Nghia obtained his medical degree and a master's in advanced studies in clinical research at the University of California, San Diego, Medical School. He subsequently completed his internal medicine residency at UCSD medical center. During his internal medicine residency training, he met an inspirational mentor, Dr. Siddharth Singh, an assistant professor in the Division of Gastroenterology at UCSD, who was instrumental in sparking his interest in inflammatory bowel diseases and big data. His ultimate goal is to become a physician-scientist with a research focus in



leveraging big data from electronic health records and national registries to improve clinical care and population health management strategies for patients with IBD.

Nghia chose UCSD because of the amazing faculty he had encountered during his medical school and internal medicine residency, the incredible support from Dr. William Sandborn, and the unique research training and opportunities available. Currently, he is completing a National Institutes of Health funded T32 Gastroenterology Fellowship and will subsequently start a National Library of Medicine funded T15 Biomedical Informatics Fellowship at UCSD in July 2020. During his informatics training, he will concurrently start an IBD fellowship under the mentorship of Dr. William Sandborn.

Outside of his training, Nghai enjoy spending time with my wife and son, watching all professional sports teams from the Bay Area (northern California), and trying new cuisines.

Welcome to our incoming FY21 Advanced Endoscopy Fellow



Please join us in extending a warm welcome to our incoming advanced endoscopy fellow, **Dr. Phillip Fejleh**. Phil first moved to San Diego to attend college at UCSD, where he completed a Bachelor's degree in Anthropology before returning to his home state of Arkansas to obtain his medical degree at the University of Arkansas. He subsequently completed an internal Medicine residency at Washington University in St. Louis, followed by Gastroenterology fellowship at UCLA where his research interests included walled-off pancreatic necrosis, post-polypectomy bleeding, and the use of artificial intelligence in endoscopy. Outside of work, Phil enjoys running, hiking, and spending time with his wife Samantha and 2 year-old son Dean.

Welcome incoming FY21 GI Fellows



Zachary Gitto
Mass General
CLINICAL



Jesus Dominguez
Johns Hopkins
CLINICAL



Donald Goens
Univ of Chicago
CLINICAL



Cynthia Hsu
UCSD
RESEARCH



Eric Low
UCSD
RESEARCH

2021
GI
Fellows

Fellows Update

The following Fellows have accepted abstracts for poster presentation to DDW and will be presenting: Lien le, Ali Akram, Ariela Holmer, Ed Yang, Nghia Nguyen & Ngozi Enwerem
*Poster of distinction.

Please be sure to show them your support in at DDW in Chicago this May!

Research Highlights

Amir Zarrinpar, MD, PhD received a grant from the Prevent Cancer Foundation to investigate the microbiome of cancers as a possible blood-based biomarker for detection of liver hepatocellular carcinoma at an earlier stage. Prevent Cancer Foundation awards research grants and fellowships to promising early career scientists with Novel hypotheses for prevention and early detection.



<https://www.preventcancer.org/research/researcher-profiles/#awardees>

Liver hepatocellular carcinoma is the fifth most common tumor worldwide and the second most common cause of cancer-related deaths. Current screening methods rely on liver imaging in patients who have known cirrhosis and/or alpha fetoprotein (AFP). However, over 13 percent of patients with this cancer do not have cirrhosis and have never been screened for it. Another 30 to 40 percent of patients have normal AFP. This leads to diagnosis of this cancer at a later stage when there are few, if any, treatment options available.

Dr. Zarrinpar also received a National Phenylketonuria Alliance Grant. The National Phenylketonuria (PKU) Alliance's goal is to improve the life of individuals with PKU and to find a cure. Patients with PKU have a genetic disorder where the enzymes necessary to metabolize phenylalanine is mutated and dysfunctional. These patients end up having cognitive and emotional disorders as a result of the excess of phenylalanine, and have to adhere to a strict no-protein diet to survive. The Zarrinpar lab received a pilot grant from the National PKU Alliance to investigate the use of perpetually colonizing engineered bacteria to permanently "knock in" the missing gene into the gut microbiome, potentially curing the disease.

GI, Department of Medicine faculty on grant to establish biomed PhD program in Mozambique

For the second time last December, UC San Diego Health faculty including **Dr. Kim Barrett**, Distinguished Professor of Medicine, visited southern Africa to foster advanced biomedical training in the nation of Mozambique, with the goal to initiate Mozambique's first biomedical PhD degree-granting program at the Universidad Eduardo Mondlane (UEM). Under the auspices of a five-year grant from the NIH/Fogarty International Center, the UC contingent are assisting their Mozambican colleagues in the expansion of available curriculum at UEM to support this PhD program, will continue to support faculty and research



capacity development at UEM, and will sponsor the first cadre of five PhD candidates. Principal Investigator Dr. Robert "Chip" Schooley, Infectious Disease Specialist and Chief, Division of Infectious Diseases, has been collaborating with the medical school in (the capital city) Maputo for many years -- "the wrinkle with this grant was to help them strengthen their grad programs as opposed to the work with medical residents they had focused on before," Dr. Barrett says. Joining Dr. Barrett and Dr. Schooley last year were Dr. Constance A. Benson, Professor of Medicine and Global Public Health and Dr. Randy Taplitz, clinical director of Infectious Diseases at UCSD Health.

🌿 GI Holiday Photos 🌿

UCSD GI Division Holiday Party @ AleSmith Brewing Company, December 7, 2019



Motility Holiday Party @ Park Commons, December 19, 2019



(Left to right) Jennifer Salazar, Mary Clarke, David Kunkel, Ravinder Mittal, Stephanie Dremel, Madeline Greytak, Alyssa Lorenzo, Stephanie Reed, Dyan Donovan, Jerrilyn Brown, Ashley Nodalo.

GLOGE Holiday Party, December 2019:



Recent Events

16th Annual Endowed Jon I. Isenberg Lecture

On Feb. 4, 2020 we hosted the 16th Annual Isenberg lectureship with guest speaker, Chief of Gastroenterology and Hepatology at Northwestern University, Dr. John Erik Pandolfo. Dr. Pandolfo presented on topic of “Esophageal Physiology: Manometry to Computational Plumbing”. The hosts of the lectureship were Dr. Rena Yadlapati & Dr. Ravinder Mittal.



8th Annual Advances in Gastroenterology & Hepatology Conference

On February 1, 2020 UCSD Division of Gastroenterology & Hepatology hosted an interactive one-day activity presenting cutting-edge new information for improving assessment and management of patients with gastrointestinal conditions, and to place recent advances in context of current assessment and management paradigms. Course Directors: Samir Gupta, MD, MScS & William Sandborn, MD.





UC San Diego School of Medicine

Established in 1968, University of California San Diego School of Medicine is consistently ranked among the top medical school programs in the country for primary care and research by *U.S. News & World Report* and among the top 10 medical schools for National Institutes of Health total funding. The school is internationally recognized as a place where discoveries are delivered — bringing breakthroughs from the research lab to patients' bedsides. Faculty members care for patients at UC San Diego Health, where primary care is available at several convenient locations throughout San Diego County and our advanced specialty care consistently ranks among the nation's best. For more information, visit medschool.ucsd.edu.

Our Mission

The UC San Diego Gastroenterology & Hepatology Division will provide the best clinical care to those afflicted with gastrointestinal and liver diseases, investigate at the clinical and basic levels the best way to improve those diseases, and educate trainees on how to best approach the care of patients with those diseases. The UC San Diego GI Division will strive to be nationally recognized through its faculty as well as innovations that will improve the care of patients with gastrointestinal and liver diseases nationwide. The UC San Diego GI Division was founded in 1970 by Henry Wheeler, MD, who served as its first division chief. Later, Jon I. Isenberg, MD, led the division from 1979 to 1993, followed by C. Richard Boland, MD, from 1995 to 2003, John M. Carethers, MD, from 2004 - 2009 and William J. Sandborn from 2011-present. The GI Fellowship Training Program commenced in 1974 and the NIH Training Grant was initially funded in 1976. The division has trained several local gastroenterologists in San Diego, as well as developed several academicians at University based medical schools, including some with leadership and administrative positions.

Charitable Donations

You may contribute directly to UC San Diego GI by visiting our website at <https://giveto.ucsd.edu> and clicking on the **GIVE** tab on the right-hand side. Remember: if you itemize, you may be able to receive a charitable deduction for 2020 for your gifts received on or before December 31.