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# Donations hit record \$2.9 billion in 2018, but charities expect collections to fall this year due to pandemic



\$2.9 billion is the highest in the past decade. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE



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SINGAPORE - Donations to charities here reached a 10-year high of \$2.9 billion in 2018, before the coronavirus unleashed chaos all over the world and put the brakes on many fund-raising events this year.

According to the recently released Commissioner of Charities (COC) 2019 annual report, donations to charities rose by 8 per cent from \$2.7 billion in 2017 to \$2.9 billion in 2018.

Commissioner Ang Hak Seng told The Straits Times this \$2.9 billion is the highest in the past decade - about 60 per cent more than the \$1.8 billion collected in 2009.

Dr Ang attributed the record donations in 2018 largely to increases in donations in the education, religious, social and welfare sectors.

For example, the New Creation Church collected \$112 million in donations in 2017. This rose to \$122 million in 2018 and \$126 million last year, according to a Straits Times check of financial reports on the COC website.

The church spokesman said the donations were tithes and offerings from its members and "a direct result of the church reaching more people than ever before."

One of Singapore's most successful fund-raisers is the National University of Singapore. In its financial year (FY) that ended in March, it collected \$150 million in donations, even though this was a fall from the \$214 million in FY2019 and \$227 million in FY2018.

At end-December last year, there were 2,281 registered charities, according to the COC annual report released in late September.

Religious groups, such as churches and temples, made up close to half of them. The other charities included those in the social and welfare sector, health, arts and heritage and sports.

## Donations collected by charities

\$ billion

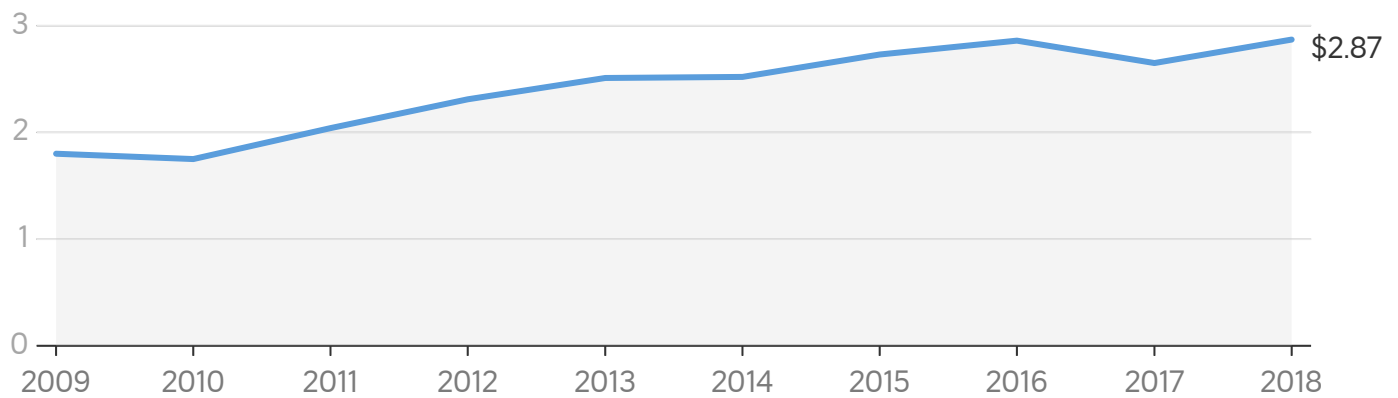


Chart: STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS • Source: COMMISSIONER OF CHARITIES

Meanwhile, there were only 21 newly registered charities last year, compared with 40 in 2018 and 39 in 2017.

Noting that the number of charities registered is expected to fluctuate from year to year, Dr Ang said: "Over the years, we have conducted more public education to raise the awareness of registration requirements and enhance the understanding of regulatory requirements for charities."

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Mr Kwan Jin Yao, who runs socialservice.sg, a newsletter on social service research in Singapore, said the record donations in 2018 could be due to greater generosity. He calculated that each person here gave \$361 to charity in 2009 and this rose to \$509 in 2018.

The emergence of online donations platforms, such as giving.sg, may have also boosted giving to charity in the past decade, said others interviewed.

However, with the circuit breaker and safe distancing measures to stem the spread of Covid-19 forcing many large-scale fund-raisers to be cancelled or postponed this year, Dr Ang expects donations to be lower this year.

He said: "Covid-19 pandemic has adversely impacted many charities' operations, as well as the ability of organisations and individuals to donate as much as they used to."

The SPD, for example, saw donations drop by nearly 40 per cent in April and May as compared with the same months last year.

The charity helping people with disabilities had to turn to online fund-raisers, such as a virtual flag day and an upcoming virtual walk/run, as physical events were cancelled.

But not all charities had gloomy news to report.

For example, the St John's Home for Elderly Persons raised \$1.9 million in donations in the first eight months of the year, almost double the \$1 million for the same period last year.

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Its chairman Mr Woon Wee Yim, said this is because donations through online platforms, such as giving.sg, have increased.

For example, the charity used to hold an annual fund-raising gala dinner but it had to cancel this year's due to the pandemic.

Last Sunday (Oct 18), it held its first virtual gala dinner, where donors bought restaurant meals which were delivered to their family or friends. It raised about \$320,000.

Mr Woon said: "Now we focus more effort on online fund-raising. The online donations are very encouraging."




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