Varsities, religious groups raising the most donations

Of $2.65b collected in 2017, religious groups took in $1b, educational charities $334m

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Universities and religious groups top the list in the amount of donations collected by the largest charities here.

The National University of Singapore (NUS) is the nation’s most successful fund-raiser, pulling in $227 million in its financial year that ended in March last year. The Sunday Times compiled these figures from the financial statements of 193 charities that have an annual income of more than $10 million. The information is available on the Commissioner of Charities’ website.

According to the charity watchdog’s annual report released last month, there were 2,277 registered charities as of December last year.

In 2017, the latest year available, charities collected a total of $2.65 billion in donations, 7 per cent less than the $2.86 billion in 2016.

Religious groups, such as churches and temples, collected $1 billion in donations in 2017, while educational charities took in $334 million.

Besides New Creation Church, the other religious organisations on the top 10 list for last year were City Harvest Church, Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple and Faith Community Baptist Church.

City Harvest Church collected $29 million last year, marking a near-40 per cent drop from the $47 million it raised from November 2016 to December 2017.

Faith Community Baptist Church collected $26 million last year, while Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple netted $28 million, making it the only non-Christian religious group in the top 10.

For churches with a large congregation, tithes can add up to a very significant sum. Tithing usually involves a devotee giving 10 per cent of his income to the church, which uses the donations to help fulfill its religious missions.

According to their annual reports, New Creation Church averaged close to 34,000 congregants at its Sunday services last year, while City Harvest Church’s figure was about 16,000.

Besides religion, education is another major beneficiary of largesse. Universities rely on donations for a variety of purposes, from funding bursaries to supporting research. Often, they have a large pool of alumni to tap for monetary support and are also well staffed with fund-raisers, said those interviewed.

Mr Willie Cheng, a board member of various charities, said: “The universities have honed fund-raising to a fine art. And they have sizeable fund-raising staff, at times bigger than the entire staff in smaller charities.”

The Nanyang Technological University collected $50 million, while the Singapore University of Technology and Design netted $27 million in the financial year that ended in March last year.

NUS’ Associate Professor Mak Yuen Teen, who specialises in corporate governance, believes that universities and other charities have a “moral responsibility to only raise what they can reasonably expect to use in ways that are in line with their mission”.

He said: “Other charities with worthwhile causes may find it more difficult to raise funds as donations are a bit of a zero-sum game – more for one means less for another.”