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(Knell, C. & Hunt, T., 2023)

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'We stand with you in your sorrow' - Wellingtonians mourn Loafers Lodge fire victims

Conor Knell and Tom Hunt • 20:33, Jun 15 2023

5th

Mark Jones is still haunted by what he witnessed on the night of the tragedy.

Wellingtonians have paid their respects to the five victims who died in the Loafers Lodge at a public service of remembrance at 5.30pm on Thursday.

The service was being held at Wellington Cathedral of St Paul and led by the Reverend Canon Katie Lawrence.

Photos of the five men who died in the [May 16 fire](#) – Liam Hockings, 50, Kenneth Barnard, 67, Peter O'Sullivan, 64, Melvin Parun, 68, and Mike Wahrlich, 67, who was popularly known as Mike the Juggler – were arranged in view of the congregation.

Among the speakers were mayor Tory Whanau, City Missioner Murray Edridge, St Thomas Church priest Mark Johnson, and representatives from police and Fire and Emergency.

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“We are here to share in our grief, to support one another, to come together and grow stronger as a community,” Whanau said.

She addressed the families of those who died, telling them that they had the community’s aroha.

Whanau also told survivors that “You will not be forgotten”.

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MONIQUE FORD/THE POST

Wellingtonians gather to pay their respects to the five victims who died in the Loafers Lodge at a public service of remembrance at Wellington Cathedral of St Paul.

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acknowledge and recognise your suffering and your loss.”

“To those who lost friends, homes, possessions, I hope you are comforted by the aroha and the manākitanga that surrounds you this evening”



MONIQUE FORD/THE POST

Wellington Cathedral of St Paul was three quarters full for the Loafers Lodge remember service.

On the night of the fire, he said, “Wellington changed forever – or at least I hope it did.”

He said that the community held a collective responsibility to ensure that this could never happen again.

“We all need to ensure that none of this was in vain.”

Liam Hockings’ sister, Lucy, also spoke, thanking those who supported her family and telling the congregation that “all the ordinary and extraordinary things that made him Liam will be with us always.”

Melvin Parun’s brother Lou told the congregation about how family meant everything to him. “Tonight, let us remember Mel's capacity for compassion and strength.”

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Multiple investigations are now underway into the cause and how the fatalities could have been avoided.

The lodge was, for many, a **final refuge for accommodation** before sleeping rough.

So the fire has led to questions about how society dealt with those on the margins.

At Hockings' funeral earlier on Thursday, his sister Lucy told the mourners that Liam's death, and the others, should be used as a force for change.

"I think we should all be incensed about what happened."

Ninety-nine people were living at the central Wellington lodge at the time of the fire.

Tala Sili was one of those living in the Lodge. Now he's in a Kāinga Ora public housing apartment in central Wellington



MONIQUE FORD/THE POST

Loafers Lodge fire victim Liam Hockings' sister, Lucy, read the poem Dash and spoke of all the ordinary and extraordinary things that made him Liam.

He's struggling to fathom why it took a fatal blaze to bring him here.