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Loafers Lodge fire: Man charged with five counts of murder

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Loafers Lodge evacuee, Simon Hanify talks to the NZ Herald. Video / NZ Herald ...

A man has been charged with five counts of murder over the deadly Loafers Lodge in Wellington fire last month.

The man, 48, had already been arrested and was charged with two counts of arson after the May 16 blaze, and is now facing additional charges.

Acting Wellington District Commander Dion Bennett said police completed their "5th comprehensive" scene examination, and today the scene will be handed over to Fire and Emergency New Zealand (Fenz).

Bennett said the victim's families have been advised.

After they have completed their work, the Wellington City Council and the building owner will take control of the site.

A dawn karakia will take place tomorrow for the staff involved in this operation, Bennett said, and he thanked all involved for their co-operation and assistance during this "incredibly difficult and detailed investigation".

The five people who died in the fire were Kenneth Barnard, 67, Liam James Hockings, 50, Peter Glenn O'Sullivan, 64, Melvin Joseph Parun, 68, and Michael Wahrlich, 67, known by many as Mike the Juggler.

A service of remembrance will be held at the Wellington Cathedral of St Paul, 2 Hill St, at 5.30pm on Thursday, June 15.

The date of the service marks one month from the fire. It will be led by the Reverend Katie Lawrence and will be open to the public.

A mayoral relief fund set up after the fire has raised \$346,000 to help those who have been affected.

The Wellington City Mission reported this morning \$71,300 has been distributed: \$47,500 in cash, \$2723 has gone towards accommodation, \$2390 has been spent on medical and dental services, \$2587 on whiteware, and \$11,198 on flights for whānau.

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