LIKE ALL PARENTS and educators I was shocked and horrified during the Christmas holidays when 18 year old Daniel Christie from Thornleigh died following a single punch at Kings Cross on New Year’s Eve, yet another victim of alcohol-fuelled violence.

It again reinforced to me that our youth live in such troubled and challenging times. Confronted by Violence - and surrounded by opportunities to access alcohol and drugs – our youth are growing up in a culture that calls on them to make profound personal decisions.

At the public memorial service in Sydney, Daniel’s father; Michael Christie, begged those present not to seek revenge, or carry hate, for his son’s “inexplicable” death.

“Daniel would want us all to get on with our lives without adding the extra burden of carrying any negative feelings like hate and revenge,” Christie said. “This is very important because it’s a legacy to us all from Daniel.”

He bravely called on all of us to take action at a personal level: “If change is to be, it’s up to each and every one of us,” Christie said.

Daniels’ mother, Maureen Christie, told mourners: “Daniel was generous, courageous and determined. He sought to understand himself, others, and the world he lived in.”

When reading Christie’s eulogy for his son I was particularly moved by the powerful mantra that was Daniel’s favourite saying: “If it is to be, it’s up to me”.

In 2013, the St Pius X College community was confronted with the same senseless violence when one of our Year 12 students, Liam Knight was victim to a violent act when a metal rod pierced his skull. This single incident of violence significantly impacted not only Liam’s life and his family; but his friends and our entire school community. We must see an end to such violence.

At the St Pius X College 2014 Commencement Mass, I addressed the College about what we stand for. In sharing with them the heart-breaking loss of Daniel Christie, and with the memory of Liam Knight in mind, I challenged them to make a positive difference in our world – to take up Daniel’s mantra.

I said: “Starting with you and me – bullying stops, cyber-bullying stops, violence stops, sexism stops, homophobia stops and racism stops. Instead we care for each other; we accept each other; we recognise and appreciate difference, we give to those in need and we defend those who are marginalised in our community.”

The Year 12 student leaders of all our schools are extraordinary. Their challenge is to lead by example and guidance – to make a positive difference. They have a huge influence and can make such a positive difference not only with their peer group but with younger students.

Our children need clear values taught and modelled at home. Our children listen to us and watch what we do. We need to practice what we preach. Above all, our children need to know that their parents love them unconditionally.

At Daniel Christie’s Memorial Service, the then Governor-General, Quentin Bryce, spoke emotionally outside the church for all Australians when she described Daniel’s death as “devastating and unacceptable”.

“As Governor-General and if I may say, as a parent, for all parents, all grandmothers, all fathers and grandfathers there can be no place, no excuse, no tolerance for gratuitous violence in our society,” Bryce said.

In drawing inspiration and renewed strength from these comments, we as parents and educators, take up the challenge to reaffirm our youth and develop positive behaviours.

St Pius X College Chatswood has adopted the Touchstone of Justice and Solidarity as our theme for 2014. We have committed ourselves to justice and peace for all and to stand with those who are marginalised. For all students in all schools, through the many opportunities provided for them and in their daily actions and interactions with each other; they must have self-belief and confidence that they can make a positive difference.

We take inspiration from Daniel Christie, a young man who sought to understand himself, others and his world and to take on his own mantra as our own: “If it is to be, it is up to me.”

John Couani is principal of St Pius X College, Chatswood.