

Arlo Duba's forsaking of smugness

By [Janet Edwards](#)

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I hope that the [courageous statement](#) on LGBT equality in the church by Rev. Dr. Arlo Duba in the January 24, 2011 issue of The Presbyterian Outlook is widely read and pondered upon. It has certainly provoked much reflection on my part.

For me, and perhaps for you as well, one of the many remarkable moments in Dr. Duba's testimony is his admission near the beginning:

"I was so smug that I never explored God's Word on the matter any further."

And in the [interview with Dr. Duba](#) about the ad, he reflects more on this:

"I just never questioned that the church might have gotten it wrong."

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) lives and dies by majority rule. Because we share the conviction that, "no one person knows the mind of God," we know that decisions are best made by groups and getting things done requires majority rule. So, motions are made, debate ensues, the vote is taken, and the majority wins while the minority accepts the vote and works to revisit the matter another day.

At the same time, The Book of Order warns us, "Councils may err (G-1.0307)." Smugness – in the sense that Dr. Duba is using the word – gets to the heart of majority and minority life in the church. When there is smugness on the part of the majority, it disrespects the crucial on-going participation of the minority.

If Dr. Duba's admission isn't a wake up call for us all to look for ways to better respect the participation of the minority, I don't know what is. It is time for us to confess our smugness with Arlo Duba and to pledge to stop with him.

As I see it, one instance of smugness in the church that continues to haunt the PCUSA came just before I was ordained. The GAPJC decision in the Kenyon Case, or Maxwell v Pittsburgh Presbytery, ruled that equality between men and women is an essential of Reformed faith and polity based on the creation of male and female in Genesis 1:27. The GAPJC asserted this as majority rule and required all officers of the church to join in ordaining women regardless of the minority view that read Scripture in a different way.

That smug dismissal of the dissenting minority has planted a suspicion deep in the hearts of those standing against LGBT equality. Many fear that when the day comes where pro-LGBT people are the majority, the smugness in the Kenyon case may translate to a smugness with regard to LGBT ordination. In other words, just as the minority was required to ordain women in the 1970's, so these colleagues fear they will be required to ordain LGBT people, against their freedom of conscience.

We all need to examine our own hearts to find the smugness that lurks there and to turn it over to God. We each need to require this forswearing of smugness of ourselves and then reach out the hand of fellowship in Christ to everyone else in the church. And if we meet some who remain smug in their beliefs and morality, then we need to hold them to us in love even more firmly until they wake to this particular sin and to their need for us in the life of the church, just as we need them.

This spiritual commitment to forswear smugness will help to restore the comity between majority and minority and breathe Spirit-filled life back into the PCUSA.

For myself, I am following Arlo's lead and forsaking smugness. I hope you join us.

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