

Community

YOU'LL FIND IT GROWING on rocks, logs, and trees, in all sorts of colors from splashy oranges to dull grays and bright whites. It can be flat and crusty or look like leaves. Sometimes it looks like hair or like ocean coral growing on the forest floor. There are over 3,600 species of it just in North America. It's not a plant and not just a fungus. What is it? Lichen!

Lichen is a combination of an alga and a fungus that work together to grow and thrive. The alga is able to photosynthesize—to use sunlight, carbon dioxide, and nitrogen to make energy and oxygen, just like plants do. The fungus uses that energy to grow, protecting the alga and allowing it to grow too. You can find lichen in all sorts of places, often in places that are too hard for plants who need to use their roots to grow, like on a rock or a tree trunk.

Lichen can help us understand many things too. Lichens help to filter air, so scientists can look at what lichens have trapped to see what pollution is in an area. Certain lichens will not grow where there is too much pollution, so those lichens can show us where there is clean air. And lichens provide food for animals such as caribou (reindeer) in places where plants can have a hard time growing.

Lichens also can teach us a lot about the importance of community. There are different parts to the lichen, but each part needs the other to survive. Without each other, neither is able to survive. And without lichens, the air would be dirtier, and animals that depend on the lichen for food would have a harder time surviving.

In 1 Corinthians 12, the church is compared to a body. All the parts depend on each other and have to work together, just like the fungus and the alga in the lichen. And just as

the greater world beyond the lichen needs the lichen to survive, so too does the wider world need the church. When the church works properly as a community and shows the love of Christ, many other things are affected. Sharing meals, hosting food banks, and offering drop-in centers are all ways the church can be the lichen of their community.

Dive Deeper

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. How is the church compared to a body? What does it say about how a body works? What are some ways the church can show the love of Christ to the greater community?

Try This!

Do a little research about lichens and find some lichens right in your community!



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