Green Notes: Solar Power Generators on the Roof, Await Final Connection

Our solar panels – 66 electric power generators – are sitting atop the Education Annex of First United Methodist! SBS Solar of Missoula has completed the installation's first phase.

Now comes work to connect the panels to the church building, where they will provide our electricity, and then to NorthWestern Energy's grid, where any excess power generated will flow into other buildings.

Ralph Walters, general manager of SBS Solar, said DJ's Electric will be on site sometime in the next few weeks to "make the final connections to the grid." Then the city of Missoula will dispatch an electrical inspector to make sure everything is up to code.

"And then NorthWestern Energy will reprogram your meter," Walters said, "which sometimes takes a long time and sometimes goes very fast. After that, I will come back and energize/program the system."

The whole process could take a month, but we've got plenty of work to do in the meantime!

On Wednesday, Pastor John Daniels and Green Team co-chair Jim Gillison installed a computer monitor in the Narthex that will provide real-time stats on our rooftop power

generation once the system is operational. That monitoring is required by NorthWestern Energy, and will help us educate ourselves and the larger community about how solar power works.

We'll also use the next few weeks to prepare several poster boards with information about our system and its remarkable story, plus a pamphlet with more details about solar power and First Church's history of leadership in downtown Missoula. And watch for two new plaques on either side of the Narthex computer monitor, one thanking all the donors who made this project possible – and fully paid on Day 1 of power generation. The other will be First UMC's Climate Covenant, which helped to inspire and guide this project.

Here are a few more photos, courtesy of Missoula middle school teacher and photographer Sander Tollefson, taken as the SBS crew finished the installation.